MASSTON

A Story of These Modern Days

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MASSTON:

A STORY OF THESE MODERN DAYS.

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MASSTON:

A STORY OF THESE MODERN DAYS.

BY

A. J. DUFFIELD

AND

W. H. POLLOCK.

"Some there be that shadows kiss;
Such have but a shadow's bliss:
There be fools alive, I wis,
Silver'd o'er; and so was this."
—*Merchant of Venice*, ii. 9.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MASSTON:

A STORY OF THESE MODERN DAYS.

CHAPTER I.

"Let me not live . . .
After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
All but new things disdain; whose judgments are
Mere fathers of their garments; whose constancies
Expire before their fashions."

—*All's Well that Ends Well.*

In the ancient town of Masston, in the county of Folkshire, there lived not long ago a race of workmen who were not ashamed of their work. On the contrary, they derived an active pleasure from it. When they were not whistling or singing over it they were thinking about it, for it was a kind of work which demanded sympathy as well as skill. Surgical instruments, half a century ago, were all made by hand, and

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called for care as well as cunning in the making of them. The demand was then not so great as it has since become, and the craftsmen who produced these expensive implements of useful torture had also to work at other and more homely things in order to be sure of winning a good week's wage.

Stephen Jeavons was one of this old stock of workmen, who handled iron and steel with as keen an interest as that of the sculptor who mixes his clay and scans the marble wherein his thought lies hid. Jeavons, like all his fellows, was fond of his shop—a long, low-roofed building, fitted with lathes and forges, vices and anvils, and the best provided benches of any master workman in all Masston. Nor was this building sacred only to labour. It was the dwelling of sundry feathered fowls of gaudy plumage; it was a council chamber for the discussion of home politics; an exchange where men as well as goods were appraised, and where only men transacted business. The

shop looked on to a garden, which in summer-time put on a glory that has indeed long since departed, but which in its day gave gladness and strength to all who gazed upon it, and much more to the people to whom belonged of right the support and continuance of that glory.

In the time of that garden, the workmen of Masston were tall, robust, hearty fellows, who married well, and speedily got themselves surrounded with sons and daughters; and although it cannot be said with truth that they lived in Paradise, it can be affirmed with certainty that they did not dwell in a wilderness.

If Jeavons and his fellow-craftsmen were fond of their work, they cordially hated the new fashion in which they were paid for it. Jeavons was by no means indifferent to the four or six sovereigns which were chucked at him through a little window on to a much battered wooden counter, as if he were dealing with an invisible pawnbroker, who, from delicacy of feeling, kept out of sight. What

Jeavons and his fellows did resent was the cold and ghostly chucking at them of those gold pieces.

Nor had it always been so. In bygone time they had received their money from the hands of men who were magistrates or churchwardens, in a day when something was held within the names of these offices, men who acted for London and other merchants who traded with foreign lands. These masters not only paid well for the work which they ordered, but further personally thanked the workmen for their work; and they certainly never thought of untying the stout brown paper parcels in which the work was wrapped to see if it was according to order, and worthy of its price.

But things had changed. Time, which ripens and rots, was at work in Masston, and, as happens with fruit, some of the things which looked ripest were most rotten. Of this we may see more hereafter. Enough for the present to say that the old gentlemen factors

—the Briscoes and Hammertons, the Tarrats and Tennants, Buckles and Waltons, and many others who were either dead or had now no life for business—had left their places to be filled by their sons, who wore diamond rings and studs, and kept horses and clerks.

One Saturday night Stephen Jeavons carried his pincers and plyers, his nippers and other steel toys to one of the old-fashioned warehouses for which he had worked thirty years and more. A young whipper-snapper, as Jeavons called him, opened his parcels, looked at their contents as a parlour parrot might look at a ball of red worsted, and demanded of Stephen if he called that a pair of tongs—if he thought those plyers worth six shillings a pair, and if he supposed "that he was going to get £5, 18s. for such a lot of rubbish as that."

"Come," continued the whipper-snapper, in tones of masterful insolence, "take off the odd eighteen shillings, and I will pass your goods."

"Pay me my money, bantam, and don't keep me waiting here," replied the workman.

"My orders are," said the other with the same cold insolence, "not to pay for any work that has not been examined."

"Well," was the quick answer, in somewhat alarming tones, "examine away and pay me my money."

But the whipper-snapper was already engaged in a similar encounter with another master workman who had brought with him, in obedience to orders, numerous packets of pearl buttons, and other buttons of many shapes, sizes, and colours. The button-maker was made of different stuff to the maker of steel toys. His face was sallow—his eyes seemed to swim in seas of anxiety and fear, as if he had a wife to please whose love for her husband had long been lost in care for a number of inconsiderate and ever-hungry children; so the wretched button-maker took off 15s. from a sum of £3, 15s., the value of

a considerable number of small buttons, which had occupied several little children many days to wrap up in two different kinds of paper.

As the clerk was about to attend to some other workman, Jeavons called out in tones of menace :

"If you don't take these things now and pay me at once, I'll take them all back, and never again shall you see any more of my making."

The young man gave a short dry laugh. He was good-looking, and very well dressed, with a dark eye, as capable of evil as it might be of good, but which defied all common beholders of its remarkably quiet glances to say towards which of the two opposing powers they most inclined.

As Jeavons hurriedly gathered his wares together, and was about to leave the warehouse, the young master arrived, dressed as if for an evening party.

"What is the matter, Mr. Jeavons?" inquired he; and Stephen briefly explained, not omitting the words of menace he had shot at the clerk.

"Robert," said the young master, "you can always pay Mr. Jeavons without examining his goods."

"Oh, very well, sir," was the deferential reply. But it was the last time that Stephen Jeavons ever darkened the door of that warehouse. He was one of those soldier workmen who was ready to starve for honour as he had lived and worked for honour, and who preferred to die rather than live by fraud. Stephen, however, had buried his wife, and that might—as indeed was affirmed by some, so deadly was the change which had crept over them—have been the cause of his independence, and the strength of his moral courage. Stephen had one son of the same age and complexion as the young man with whom he had been in altercation. It passed through

Jeavons's mind at the time that rather than see his boy grow into the image of that whipper-snapper of a clerk, he would have laid him flat at his feet.

Another peculiarity of this old heathen may well be told, because it introduces us to this son about whom we shall hear not a little in the course of this never-before-told story. Stephen Jeavons, instead of going to church on a Sunday morning, would dress himself in his buff-coloured breeches and blue broadcloth coat, and betake himself to the turn-stile, which led through the meadows to the village of Russet. There would he smoke a long clay pipe and talk with the serving-maids who might pass that way. He knew them all, and knew, or thought he knew, what was coming on many of them.

"That's a very pretty bonnet you've got on—where did you get it?" he smoothly inquired of one of his fair friends then passing by, and who was placed in a hobble, as he

intended she should be, by the question. When Stephen saw her blush, and become restless and hesitating, he pushed his questions further, as follows :—

"Where do you live now, Bridget Jakes; is your mother quite well?"

"I don't live anywhere now, I go to work," said the girl, meaning that she had given up domestic service and was employed in some warehouse; "my mother," she added, "is quite well, thank you, Mr. Jeavons."

"And do they pay you well at the warehouse?"

"I only got four pounds a year in service," said Bridget, defending herself from the gaze of Stephen, whose words were mild enough, but whose aspect was as stern as that of a judge; "and," she continued, "they give me fifteen shillings a week at the warehouse."

"Gold labels and silver paper, paste and pack thread," ruminated Stephen, when

Bridget remarked with a little more confidence—

"I am in the pattern-room."

But her words had no connection with the thoughts which occupied Stephen's mind, and he dismissed her with "Well, good-bye to thee, and take care of thy mother. She has been a good mother to thee."

Bridget took her leave with a very slight curtsey, and Stephen did not give her, as had been his wont, a sixpence, because "she had left service and gone—into a warehouse," he said to himself, with a sneer running all over his face till it flattened his nose.

Stephen Jeavons was, moreover, a famous cocker, and fought the best cocks in all Folkshire. Parson Haydon, the Rector of Masston, said nothing against it, for Jeavons had the finest poultry, the most delicious eggs, and no chicken ever tasted with such perfect flavour as one of Stephen's breeding. Which chickens and eggs were not, we may

note in passing, things of trade and gain, but of hospitality and worship. The Rector of Masston had drunk many a jug of home-brewed ale in Stephen's house, and the chickens and new-laid eggs were received at the Rectory as returned visits.

And if the Sunday morning was not propitious to the long white clay, Stephen still did not go to church, but smoked his pipe at home in Summer Lane, mounting steel spurs, of his own make, on leathern guards, or what was equally likely, having a private contest in the back yard for his own enjoyment and the improvement of the temper of his feathered warriors.

Stephen's Sunday doings would have escaped all notice in Masston had it not been for his son Benjamin, a lad of great promise, whose habits of mind and life were singular, and not unlike those of a young monk of the early times, when to be a monk was as heroic as it was once heroic to be a

soldier. A few traits of his early life may be recited to show this, and they are, besides, worth reading for other purposes. Benjamin was fond of minute work and study, was given to devotion, and loved his father as if he had been a tender-hearted girl.

Now, surely if Stephen Jeavons had any right to lecture serving-maids on the perils of warehouses and the pleasure and beauty of living in domestic service, he had no right to complain if a duly authorised practitioner in a cure of souls lectured him on the deep damnation of fighting cocks on the Lord's Day.

"Benjamin," said the curate to him one sunny Sunday after the morning service, "I am sure you must be grieved for your father."

"Grieved for my father?" inquired the son, to the amazement of the clergyman; "why?"

"Why?" echoed the ecclesiastic, "because for one thing he never comes to church, and

for another, cock-fighting is a debasing sin—it is a sin against society, but to fight cocks on the Sabbath-day is a crime against God—and you know it."

Benjamin looked the well-dressed, clear spoken man in the face, and could not say a word. Like all ill-used young creatures smarting under a sudden injustice which he could not expose with his tongue, he kept silence, and his face assumed a look of blank astonishment mingled with shame. The reverend gentleman, perceiving this, and altogether mistaking its meaning, he took Benjamin by the hand, called him by his Christian name, said farewell in a set tone, besought him to go home and pray for his father, and so left him.

On his way down Snowhill, Benjamin met a young man of his own age, and who belonged to his own class. The only difference in their circumstances was that Benjamin pursued the life of a workman, and the other,

like some of the serving-maids of Masston, had given up his craft and gone into a warehouse.

"Benjamin," said this youthful saint as he drew near, "you must warn your father to flee from the wrath to come."

But Benjamin, who had a quick eye and was as much moved by the expression on his mentor's face as he was by the allusion to his father, lifted up his fist, struck him a round blow on the ear, and knocked him flat on the ground.

"At him again!" cried two or three of the baser sort, who saw the affair from a distance, and ran up in hope of an amusement at other people's expense.

Neither of the youths wanted to fight, but Benjamin could now do no less than stand his ground, while the other, unable to resist the egging on of the little crowd which had gathered round the combatants, squared up to Benjamin, and the fight began.

It was soon over, and the warner of wrath to come got home with a violent inflammation of one of his eyes, and a nose seven times as big as it was wont to be; and Benjamin reached his home with his clothes much rumpled, and his best trousers split at the knee.

How black and miserable had the world suddenly become to these youths. They had both been to church—were both choristers. Each had that day been praised by the parson. Each had on that serene Sunday morning given out of his own head some well-thought-out and tolerably well-expressed interpretation of the Collect for the day, beginning with the sublime invocation, "Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, the wills of Thy faithful people." Each had received for that exhibition of his spiritual knowledge some little prize, as valuable, let us say, as a branch of wild olive, but not quite so pretty, being nothing more than a piece of card-board with a text of Scripture printed on it. A prize in its day not without merit,

but which speedily became worthless from the shape and colour of the hands that bestowed it. The young men, let us add, were both good-looking, and great favourites with their friends.

To one of them, the vanquished, the idea of wrath to come assumed a definite meaning, but a different meaning to that he had given to it in the morning. Some sort of wrath had certainly come upon himself, from which there was no flying; nor could he fly from it any more than he could fly from the pain in his nose and eyes, nor indeed would he have flown from it even though he had been suddenly presented with a pair of celestial wings.

The celestials, we are told on ample authority, but seldom waste their favours by offering them to angry men; yet in this case they would seem to have departed from their usual course; for as the bruised, sullen, fallen one sat in his wrath, dreaming of things to come which had much more to do with the prince of darkness than with angels of light, there

entered to him the new curate. The luck of some men is as wonderful as the possession of beauty, which it much resembles in the uses some do make of it. The interview of the ardent young clergyman with the youth who had been beaten in the fight resulted in the youth's discovery that he was a lucky man—a discovery never without danger to him who makes it.

Urged by the curate to tell the story of his encounter with Benjamin Jeavons, the young man, with singular modesty and manly self-denial, told such a tale of misdirected zeal and wasted valour that won him from the curate an encomium which burnt itself into his brain, fired his heart with a new ambition, and, what is more, endowed him with a new method of life.

Having already seen this rising youngster of Masston on two different occasions, once in altercation with Stephen Jeavons, and lately in combat with his son, our readers may now be told that he is none other than the famous Robert Welsher Warner of Masston—a name

renowned in every market-place in the world, a pillar of the Church in Masston, and honoured, envied, and imitated in his native town for his piety, his personal appearance, and his riches—much of whose inner and outer life will be found in this novel history.

On the Sunday of the fight between Jeavons and Warner, the evening service in Masston had not been set up: the curate, therefore, had time and opportunity to listen to the story which Warner told with so much eloquence and truth. When Benjamin Jeavons, on the Sunday morning following, presented himself as usual before the great oaken chest which stood behind the baptismal font in a corner of the old church where the choristers kept their surplices, the dog-whipper came with a message from Parson Haydon to say that he, B. J., was "never again no more to go into the choir."

These words fell on the hearer's heart pretty much like the gravel which he had often heard

fall from the grave-digger's hands on to a coffin-lid when the priest cried, "Ashes to ashes." His first impulse was to fly from the church and run away from Masston. This resolve was checked by the other eleven choristers coming up to the oaken box, Robert Warner among them, with an evident smile of superior intelligence on his handsome face. Jeavons thereupon determined to march, unsmocked as he was, behind the surpliced procession, take a place in the middle aisle in front of the reading-desk, wait till service was over to "have it out" with Parson Haydon, and at least get a clear understanding of what had happened to cause his exclusion from the choir while his enemy had been allowed to remain one of its members.

To the consternation of Benjamin, good old Parson Haydon did meet him after service, and, in strong language, told him that both he and his father were a disgrace to the town, and he wished they would both leave it!

The monstrous injustice of this magisterial proceeding was obscured to Benjamin's vision by the surprise which came over him as he saw the hitherto benign and most lovable vicar change into an angry and unreasoning beast. He had seen poor, weak-minded, ignorant men of the forge, or the hedge and ditch, suddenly change colour, curse and swear, and on very small provocation proceed to take off their shirts preparatory to a fight; but to see an English gentleman, not only angry, but mastered by his anger, his god-father too, who had loved him, and whose love he had returned in worship and profound regard,—to see him, with the suddenness with which the spark will fly out of the smitten flint, changed into a cruel, unjust, and fuming old man, was a sight which changed his mind even in the twinkling of an eye, and caused him much new wonder.

Jeavons turned his back on the parson and slowly walked down the aisle to leave the

church. As he wheeled to the left for the north door, he stopped, and then turned his face to take his last farewell of both church and parson, with a low obeisance. It was a simple, unpremeditated act, and might have been the result of instinct. Jeavons himself was of the same opinion as he recalled the circumstance in after-life.

The new curate, who had been instrumental in converting a yellow widow lady in black velvet and plain front of hair, into a bride in puce satin, and a front of curls, had evidently converted good old Parson Haydon into a creature as cruelly zealous as himself.

Among the dreadful changes which came over Masston, the change that fell on its warm-hearted, humane, and reasonable vicar, was the most strange and bitter to many,—it was certainly the most heeded, as it was the most easy, perhaps, to note. To some, it was a change that could be compared to nothing else than the comfortable old shep-

herd's dog which had taken to fold with the sheep, suddenly recovering its untrained youth and indulging its passion for worrying. The reader is requested to elect for himself which conversion of the two is the strongest evidence of the curate's power : a rich lady yellow with unwholesome food, long past middle-age, becoming the curate's wife, or a ripe, generous-hearted humane man becoming a servile imitation of one absolutely below him in everything except what is familiarly known as "the gift of the gab."

Masston, in those days, although near to several villages more ancient than itself, was separated from them by long roads and lanes, where great trees grew in lofty avenues, and which seemed to have been planted and trained to stateliness and grandeur by a people who appreciated those qualities too highly to allow them to become the property of mortals whose staying powers were of the feeblest kind. Hawthorns and hollies stood between

Masston and the villages of Russet, Averil, and Leasows, like the sentinels of an army bent on defending the sleepy fields from a surprise which would turn them into clay pits, gravel pits, or water holes.

The sweetest of those moss-covered villages, whose cottage roofs were gardens, was Russet, and certainly the sweetest girl in Russet was Sarah Armstrong, the only daughter of Job and Mary Armstrong, who supplied Masston with fresh eggs, cheese, and butter every market Thursday.

Masston not infrequently went to Russet, at least so did many of its young men and maids, especially on summer Sundays, when the Armstrongs dispensed curds and whey to their visitors, who would carry back with them to Masston little bundles of mushrooms to some of Sarah Armstrong's regular customers; for no one in those days, be it remarked, sold mushrooms, any more than they did groundsel for canaries or water-

cresses for gentlemen who studied law and occasionally followed the Folkshire hounds. At least Sarah Armstrong never dreamed of making a sale of what the fields brought forth of their own accord.

Stephen Jeavons and Job Armstrong, besides being distantly related by blood, were united by a common passion; they were the greatest connoisseurs in game-cocks and cocking in Folkshire, and Stephen often walked over to Job's farmstead to eat home-made bread and cheese, drink home-brewed ale, and discourse on the connection of good fighting in cocks with the flavour of the flesh of pullets; any cock who refused to fight under any circumstances, however adverse, was never allowed by those judges of good taste to have the honour of attending on a single being who had anything to do with producing eggs and game chickens.

Stephen Jeavons had not quite approved of the temper of his son, now a well-grown

manly fellow, who, he thought, cottoned to men whose hackles contained too many short feathers to please him. When, therefore, he heard of the scene in the church, and the stripping off of his surplice, the father resolved on giving his son a treat such as he had never seen—that should inspire him with a man's courage; the true courage which never fails to tell a man when the time comes that it is better to die fighting than to run away from noble strife.

This was nothing less than a main, to come off at Russet on a given Monday devoted to a saint whose shrines increase as pasture-lands disappear, and whose devotees become more numerous the poorer and more desperate they become. Benjamin had never witnessed a conflict of this nature, and Benjamin's father, who thought he knew a cure for the heart ache, and that a controversy of blood between a chosen warrior of his own breed, and another of the school and training

of Job, would have the effect on Benjamin of filling up a void, that if not attended to in time might get occupied with dangerous and explosive stuff, that would one day go off of its own accord.

Father and son, therefore, trudged off on the appointed day to Russet, each carrying a long white bag that contained a feathered gladiator, more ready for bloody deeds and daring attitudes than any Roman of the good old heathen times.

"Why, Sary, where beest thee agoin, lass, and me and Ben has come a purpose to see thee? turn back, wench, and doont disapint Ben as well as me too."

"No, no, Mr. Jeavous, there is enough without me. I am going to gather you some mushrooms."

"Dang the mushrooms; come thee ways and see what's good for sore eyes and sulky souls."

"No, no, no," and Sarah Armstrong—for it was none other than she—ran across the

meadow by the little ancient church of Russet, where she was joined by no one else than Robert Warner, who, it seems, was also a visitor at the Armstrong's farm.

This unexpected meeting took away all taste for sport of any kind from Benjamin Jeavons; he dropped the bag which he carried on to the grass at his father's feet, and turned and walked back to Masston, his heart filled with loathing, and all the corroding cares and abominable imaginings which the jealous fiend could pack into it. His jealousy would not have been so keen, or his wrath so sullen, if he had not on that very morning resolved to see Sarah, and talk to her with the object of making her weekly visits to Masston of greater mutual interest than —through his own fault—they had hitherto been. Theology and carol singing had till now occupied his soul and his time; when he was not fitting some instrument, or hardening it by a secret process, the knowledge of which was confined to his own family, he was reading or

singing—processes which did not apparently favour the discovery of even such excellencies as those which adorned the lovely girl who never varied the hour of her visit to his father's house or the present of eggs, cheese, or mushrooms, according to the season, which her own hands had made or gathered, and carried from Russet to Masston. Now that the carol singing was stopped, and the study of the heroic days of the Church no longer helped him to be heroic in a time when it seemed that all heroism was dead and gone, he found a charm not altogether incongruous with these in turning himself to Sarah Armstrong. As he walked by the side of his father towards Russet he dwelt on the warm and peaceful expression of her brown eyes, the sweet freedom of her smile, and the still sweeter strength of her constant beauty. Her walk was beautiful, so also was the shape of her head, which, when she took her bonnet off, produced the same magical effect on her whole person as the

removal of the damping cloth from the head of Love in clay has on the entire statue when the sculptor himself removes it for you to look at. Benjamin Jeavons found in his contemplation of Sarah Armstrong all the delight and animation, the love, and pure happiness which had been conferred upon him by the acquired luxury of active, disciplined thought, suggested and illustrated by remote but glorious events, but chiefly by persons whom he knew less by personal experience than by name, and the report of the quality of their renowned and immortal acts.

We have seen what happened. The very fellow who had robbed him of his reputation, stripped him not only of his chorister's surplice, but of his good name, in the estimation at least of his god-father, had laid his hands on the only human being that had kindled in his heart the passion of love.

If Benjamin Jeavons loved Sarah Armstrong why could he not tell her so? Alas for youth-

ful lovers and all young human creatures; they are like files which have only received one cutting, there is no bite in them; the cutting must be crossed before the file goes straight and does good work, and much crossing, it would seem, is needed in the making of men as well as files.

Robert Warner, who had no love for the girl at all, told her that he loved her, and she believed him. And that, like many another false word of similar sort, was not only the cause of great trouble, but the occasion, likewise, of this book being written, which is not, however, the first book of history and travels that has had its spring in what, for precise description, might be called a measureless lie.

The cock-fighter's son could as easily have knocked Robert Warner down as walk back to Masston, had he been in the very least tempted to do so. Other thoughts occupied him; some quite new and altogether unconsidered ideas took possession of him; one of which glanced

slightingly at Sarah. She fell in his estimation for that it had been possible that this handsome hypocrite should be noticed by her, and allowed to make love to her. Benjamin did not know her. For that matter he did not know himself —he could not even steady himself sufficiently to take any aim whatsoever, moral aim or other. This is proved by the evil thought which seized his mind for a moment, and which finally concluded his controversy with himself about Sarah that he would leave her to find out for herself what a false-hearted cur was he on whom she had evidently bestowed her heart. So he went straight to his shop. His care and solace was work, and in beating iron and polishing steel he found his repose and resignation; over his lathe he forgot the pangs of jealousy—forgot that he had loved a pretty girl—forgot Robert Warner, the priestly ignorance and intolerance of the new curate, and the turbulent injustice of good old Parson Haydon. Work is a great renovator. But

one may renovate himself thread-bare if there be not some show of restraint.

An insatiable fondness for work at this early time pervaded Masston. Every man's house was a workshop. A man's patterns were more his stock-in-trade than his tools. The greatest capital a workman could possess was ingenuity and skill at the lathe, with the chisel, the graver, and the hammer, and, above all, with the head that could design and the hand that could mould. On the day that Benjamin Jeavons saw Robert Warner follow after Sarah Armstrong round by the village church of Russet, the tallest chimney in all Masston was the chimney of Dr. Cumberladge's dwelling-house in St. James's Square, and Dr. Cumberladge himself it was who, at the moment that our pilgrim of work found himself in a brown study on the possible value of blue steel, entered Jeavons's shop.

"Well, Benjamin, where's your father? you must find him at once for me, for no one but he can do the job I want doing."

"My father's gone to Russet."

"What! cock-fighting?"

"I helped him to carry two cocks to Armstrong's."

"Well, of course, that means a fight, and of course he'll not be back till late,—a plague on his cock-fighting."

"Could I do the job, sir?" inquired Benjamin with much modesty.

The doctor, eyeing the young man, replied by asking him if he thought he could mend his great grandmother? Nevertheless, the sceptical but kindly-natured doctor took from his pocket a complicated surgical instrument which had given way at the joint in an operation, and handed it to the young workman to examine.

"This cannot be mended," said Benjamin, "but I can make a new one as quickly as my father could, and better than this ever was, for the man who made it did not know where to put into it the principal strength."

"Well, Benjamin, son of Stephen, set to work."

The surgeons of Masston were not behind its artizans in mechanical ingenuity, for the wounds and fractures, as well as the complaints and disorders new to the town, required new treatment, as they likewise called forth not only dexterity and demanded also great readiness, but great precision in the application of skill; and who shall tell whether or not the search after appropriate remedies required for new but desperate cases does not help your surgeon to retain his human feelings in all their tenderness and freshness, although constantly compelled to do things and witness sights of agony and suffering that might otherwise blunt or harden his heart!

At any rate, Benjamin Jeavons was consoled; he forgot his troubles, had his jealousies cast out of him, and his good-nature restored by the contemplation of a surgical instrument.

CHAPTER II.

" The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek ;
A goodly apple rotten at the heart."

—*Merchant of Venice*, i. 3.

When Robert Warner first knew Sarah Armstrong, she was a rosy, dark-eyed country girl, with much love for simple things. One of her delights was the reading of romantic stories; and, when not absorbed in the fortunes of Edwin and Emma, or carried out of herself by the recital of the deeds of Amadis and Orlando, she was poring over stories of a more sacred order, and giving apparently an indiscriminating credence to all. As, however, she kept the Biblical romances for her leisure time on Sundays, and only read the others on week-days, it may fairly be inferred that she knew the difference between sacred

and profane things, and rightly divided them to the satisfaction of her parents and the rector of the parish.

Sarah was no less given to singing. Without any knowledge of music she made music wherever she went. Her laughter was the ripple of sweet sounds. There was music in every tone of her voice—music seemed to attend her steps when she walked or ran, or skipped down the fields, mainly to let the fresh air play through the raddle of her abundant brown hair. When she stood still, as in church, you could see that the sweet pose of her figure, in noway clothed to entice the eye, was induced by listening to what to her was divine music.

How did it happen that Robert Warner met Sarah Armstrong? and, still more profoundly awful, how came Sarah Armstrong to fall in love with Robert Warner?

Reader! take a cigarette; or, if you are a lady, let us take together a turn round the

daffodils, or round anything else that is pretty and will let us look at it without offence, and thus, without malice, yet also without fear, let us tell all we know of Robert Warner's love for Sarah Armstrong. Some may have a liking for him, others will excuse—perhaps, praise him, a few condemn him, but to be equal to either of these we must know a little more of him.

Robert Warner had been sucked in by the torrent of religious emotion which then swept through the town of Masston. He acquired a profound sense of the wickedness of the times, and in a solemn but perfectly free manner with an air of mastery that in one so young was admirable, he regarded the sins and the follies of his frail and less positive fellow-creatures as insults to the Majesty of heaven, and as if they offended his own moral sense of smell. This solemnity of mind did not interfere with his daily duties nor in any way weaken his

devotion to commercial pursuits. On the contrary, it has been affirmed by many of his friends that the fervency of spirit with which he pursued religious things was the mainspring of that success in business which afterwards distinguished his remarkable career.

Warner's general conviction about the common wickedness of men had a particular application. He became concerned more for Sarah Armstrong's soul than for her love. He was unhappy for her, and told her so; he insisted that she was carnally minded, that she was callous to religious influences; and when he further spoke of something more which to him was invested with dreadful sacredness, and she only answered with merry laughter, to his earnest and business-like nature the sound seemed like a shriek of horrid blasphemy.

They had been strolling in the fields, he now led her to a seat, he laboured to instruct her—in the religious jargon of the day—in

the peculiar doctrines of the free-thinking happy mortals who are justified by faith, have the assurance of the Spirit, and the daring which comes from the certain knowledge that they will finally persevere.

Sarah, during the time of her lover's discourse, was occupied solely with the fire of his eye, the mantling bloom on his fine face, the music of his eloquent and uncommon words; and Warner was vexed to find that this was all. He rose from his seat and walked sulkily away. Sarah followed after him, begged that he would not leave her merely because she was ignorant and could not understand. She never had thought it necessary to understand anything. She had enjoyed all he had said; she had with gladness listened to the sound of his voice as he revealed to her the wonderful things she heard for the first time in all her life.

"But, Robert," she added, with invincible candour, as if the love within her was defend-

ing itself against an unfair advantage, "I feel just the same when I read the old stories. If I were to stop to understand them I should have no pleasure."

"Yes, you would," ejaculated mollified sulkiness.

"No, I shouldn't," responded reassured love. "'The Pilgrim's Progress' is, after all, the grandest book I ever did read. It makes me laugh, and cry, and sing, and dance all at once. One morning, I remember, after I had finished the victory of Mr. Greatheart over the giant, and the ladies were delivered out of his power, and they all went on their way rejoicing, I was so excited and carried away that when I went to milk our big roan cow I could get no milk from her because I squeezed her so hard," and the delightfully happy, careless girl, laughed at her own story till the tears sprang from out her eyes as freely as morning dew is shaken from a rose.

Warner looked more and more offended, and

walked away from her, not straight on, but at right angles to the path they were taking, to manifest his aversion and disgust.

Sarah followed him, took his right arm in both her hands, hung her whole body's weight on to his, looked up in his face, and won her lover back from the ardent speculations of the mystics to the warmer realities of a delightful human love.

He kissed her. He took his arm from the embrace which held it, and with it embraced the body of the happy maid, whose whole life till now had been one continued act of giving love to others. Now she was receiving the glorious return of a man's love. Already was she, out of the delicious joy which possessed her, realising the fuller joy which should be ever after hers in bestowing not only all her love, but also her life and self on him.

They walked through the fields besprent with humble flowers, whose myriad gleaming petals compelled heaven itself to partake of an

earthly joy. The earth was sweetened by the breath of roses and of kine, and not sweetened merely, but made quick with new life.

The lovers were the only human occupants of the scene. Flowers and kine, trees and air, the heavens themselves, belonged to them only, and they two belonged to each other,—with this difference, that Sarah Armstrong loved Robert Warner for his own sake, and as only a woman can who gives her body, soul, and spirit when she gives her love, and Robert Warner loved Sarah Armstrong for his own sake and purpose merely, chastened by a sort of desire to make her as good as he was himself.

How she loved him,—she had very nearly succeeded in teaching him what love was, and how to love; and perhaps if Warner had never troubled himself about matters that were, possibly, too high for him, and possessed himself wholly of the real love this woman gave him, it might have fared better with his love for that majestic, divine, but really tremendous

and awful Being, whose face he had never seen, and about whom after all he knew nothing but what he got from hearsay.

"Then, do you mean to say that what appears to be Robert Warner's real passion for Divine things, his religious fervour, his devotion, are objects of ridicule?"

"No, madam, not of ridicule, but of scorn, and that because he refused to see any divine beauty in Sarah Armstrong; and had no religious fervour and devotion for the being who loved him as did she, and because he persisted in lavishing all these forces of his nature on a being of whom he knew absolutely nothing."

It was a strange and startling experience even for Warner, that the next day following this delicious night in the Armstrong fields at Russett should find him in an enforced controversy with himself, which ended in his pondering the momentous question of the nineteenth century:

"Is it possible to make the best of both worlds?"

If to Sarah Armstrong there had, up to the time of her becoming acquainted with Mr. R. W. Warner, been more than one or two worlds, they had now become merged into one.

The change which in that time of changes, already noted, when rottenness was mistaken for ripeness, overtook even her. For a while it changed her whole being. It stole all music from out her heart and limbs. It hung the trees with tears, and the heavens with black.

CHAPTER III.

"O Opportunity ! thy guilt is great."
—*Lucretius.*

THE changes in Masston continued from day to day. They were as rapid as infection, and as real as those of an April sky when the rainbows come and go, and the very drops of rain are changed into precious jewels to look at.

A man wanted a cool head to keep himself steady, events were so bewildering in the rapidity of their occurrence. Through simply becoming giddy men lost their footing and their places, and fell to lower degrees. Others, far from falling, made stepping-stones of their prone neighbours, and rose to higher things, which was not so much a moral as a temporal rising of some of Masston's men. If any made the mistake that because a man rose rapidly in that famous town he rose in any other sense, it

might not inaptly be attributed to the nature of the craft he pursued, and which was first founded, practised, and brought to perfection in Masston.

This was the sublime art and mystery of making things that were not appear as though they were—when iron was made to look like brass or copper; brass like gold; and lead and other dull and meagre metals look like silver.

Masston, as it now is, may be said to have been built upon brass; just as when Benjamin Jeavons and Robert Warner were boys, it might be said to have been sustained by steel. Steel gave way to brass, because in the race between them brass became the favourite; Masston became as famous for its brass as Tyre for its dyes, or Toledo for its blades.

Robert Warner grew up into a man of brass. He caught the spirit of the time, and changed his pursuit for one in which all the world contended. At the time of his love-making with Sarah Armstrong he had, by his prudence,

force of character, and genius, done a new thing in many-handed Masston. He turned several hundred men into so many human bricks, with which he proceeded to build a fortune and a name.

His name already was on everybody's lip—no village prattle or town talk but included the name of Robert Warner. No name stood higher in the local firmament, and the villages and small towns round the daily-increasing Masston were by it stirred to their depths as vermin are stirred by the sun.

These several hundred human bricks, it should be explained, were so many Masston workmen, who up to the advent of Mr. Warner were their own masters, who did their own work in their own way and time and place, receiving the reward thereof not as wages, but in direct payment from a public who stood in need of their wares. This payment was liable to a fluctuation that but ill accorded with the wants of human mouths, whose de-

mands refused to fluctuate. Mr. Warner made himself a rock for the occasion; if work became uncertain he found work for those who were willing to labour. It is true that he did not pay quite so much for it as did the London and Bristol merchants, as it was understood that he ran a certain risk in what was technically known as working for stock.

In process of time, which appeared very short to some observers, these independent workmen became journeymen of Mr. Robert Warner, and were by that process changed into so many separate members of a great body, the trunk and head of which was Warner. He divided and conquered. These Masstonites now no longer made whole things, but one workman made one part, another another part, and so each became dependent upon each other, and all upon Mr. Warner. It can easily be understood, therefore, that if a hundred workshops were all thrown into one, a great workshop would follow. Such

was the case; the Oxford Works, the pride of Masston, and one of the wonders of the commercial world, sprang into existence, or appeared to do so, as Minerva sprang from the head of Jove.

These celebrated premises were laid out on a vast scale, and testified to the daring and skill of the man who planned them. The great front, some seven storeys in height, was surmounted by a Greek pediment, in stone or stucco, wherein one single muse figured to an admiring populace. "ROBERT WELSHER WARNER, PATENTEE, A.D. 18—." From the central front there were to run, in two parallel lines, enclosed at the end, vast rows of workshops, as time, opportunity, and money might serve, for two thousand hands. Meanwhile, the great front was devoted to magnificent show-rooms, wherein things innumerable in brass, which beggar description, were displayed to merchants and others who held commerce with every town and country under the revolving sun.

These show-rooms were the talk of the kingdom, the astonishment of the country round about, the pride and glory of the time. In these salons of Masston art merchant princes discovered the growing need of their subjects and how to satisfy them. Cabinet ministers discovered new meanings in the events of the day, and the universal activity, by visiting these splendid repositories. The benevolent great Duchess, not in title only, but in nature and fame, who had a place not so many miles away, came to see the Oxford Works, and ordered several things for her own use. That beautiful and most charming woman, then in the fulness of her grace and sweetness, never knew for herself the glory she had shed on that manufactory. Yet did she change it into a palace. It was the pride of every workman who had seen that apparition of commanding beauty and supreme sweetness to belong to the Oxford Works. They bought her portrait

and put it up in front of the benches at which they worked. They went mad with joy. They began to invent new things for the Duchess. The man who had not seen the Duchess and knew not how to speak of her was an inferior creature, unblessed with a taste of the sweetest thing in life. When this most love-inspiring lady, whom it is a boast of Englishmen to have seen, spoken to, or in any way served, again shortly afterwards came to the Oxford Works, Robert Warner gave all his men a holiday, and the noble lady there and then proposed that when it would suit them all to bring their wives and little ones to Trythem Lodge, she would be there to give them welcome on any summer day that they might choose.

Fresh orders for new and costly things were given by the great lady—some of her own design. Workmen were sent for to receive her own instructions, or were invited to make

suggestions and offer improving ideas. The sun could not have added more splendour to the sky on the first day it was hung in the firmament than did this lofty and heroic woman add of true joy and elevating love to the mind and nature of many a working-man in the town of Masston.

Other ladies visited the Oxford Works. The place became a fashionable resort.

Meanwhile, the loves of Sarah Armstrong and Robert Warner, if that can be called love between two mortals which is altogether on one side, had grown cold. Robert no longer cared for the conversion of Sarah,—he left her to work out her own salvation; he was convinced that he could not help her. He now visited her only occasionally, but at each visit he found an increased love and trust in the trusty girl. What cause had he not given for upbraiding, and yet how dumb she was, nor did she open her mouth except to make him feel the sweetness of her heart. He was

well-nigh subdued: almost had she won him wholly to her. But the cares of a world grown great and renowned, together with the glory of riches, filled his soul to choking, till at last Robert had no time for his usual evening walk to Russet. It was a long week to some one which passed without her lover's voice sounding in her ears; but when the Sunday came and brought him, all pain was forgotten in the present fulness of pure joy. Still, even the Sundays no longer came and went without leaving traces of tears which need not have been shed.

"I do not wish you to come to Masston any more on market days," Robert said to her on one of these chequered Sabbaths; "there is no reason why you should do so."

"I like it," was the reply; "my mother did it when she was young, and why should not I?"

"The times have changed now. Your mother was then bent on marrying a farmer

and remaining a farmer's wife. You may come to be a lady."

The tone and stuff of her lover's talk was strangely unnatural to her, but she could refuse him nothing, and therefore had to comply in this as in many other things distasteful to her.

When she told her father of the request, and that she must obey, he, like a good easy old soul, had nothing to say to her, but that she should please herself. Her mother, on the contrary, was highly offended, and old Stephen Jeavons, when he heard of it, refused ever again to see old Job Armstrong, or to go to his house, and went the length of calling Job a white-livered hen.

It was during this time that Warner proved in his own experience the truth of the saying that "godliness is profitable for all things."

Reputed saints and reputed sinners alike helped him to an experimental proof of verities which the majority of men had to take on

trust. The money required to finish the Oxford Works came to him almost without asking. Shrewd men of business connected themselves with a rising man who knew so well how to unite industry with skill and mastership, and who had acquired a remarkable name among every class of people in the town. The leading men and women who had associated themselves with the religious movement in Masston looked upon Mr. Warner as the noble example and outcome of the cause they espoused. The unanimity in which this was done, although done secretly and under the profoundest vows of silence, shows how, at the bottom of things, one sole but strong uniting bond of principle bound together all the real professors of religion. The broad-brimmed hat and dove-coloured silk bonnet, as well as the gay false hair and shapely skirts of others, the dear delightful waistcoats, and the immaculate bands and gown, and other trappings which

distinguish one religious man and woman from others, are only the work of milliners or tailors. The fire can easily burn these flimsy distinctions, and when it does it will be found that there was no difference at all among them. They all lent Warner money freely and without restraint, and some went the length of believing that it was a duty to do so. How often did that money form the subject of private extempore prayers?—as often as it did of public praise, and that was every day. For their money he gave these Christians the finest show-room in all England, which he filled with all things that could be made in brass; a manufactory that could be likened to nothing else than a hive in which a thousand orderly and busy bees made honey, and over them all a ruler, who apparently cared as much for the souls of the busy bodies who made it as he did for the delicious stuff they made. He gave them more. Voluntary lay agencies for clerical work sprang up as thick as mushrooms,

and as suddenly, and the first district visitor on a grand scale for the new religion, or the new form it took in Masston, was produced in Warner's show-room.

If the kind-hearted religious people of Masston lent Mr. Warner their money with open hands, they had the uncommon pleasure of seeing the churches and chapels of the town filled with Mr. Warner's workmen. Mr. Warner himself became marvellously changed. He was quick to observe the effect of all things that had any promise of profiting him, and to reproduce them in their outward seeming. His nature might be compared to a mirror; so rapid and brilliant was it to reflect what fell upon its surface, and so little was there behind that surface. It was this quick and shallow observation which made him one morning appear at the works in full evening costume—a well-cut coat, which certainly till then had never been seen by daylight in Masston, and all the other garments required to assist at a

funeral or a Mansion House dinner. The impression at first on every one's mind was that Mr. Warner was going to a funeral. None had the courage to inquire. When this most unusual dress became his constant wear, after having called to it the attention of all the world, Mr. Robert Warner had become one of the most respected persons in all Masston. The people around him adopted the meaning which he put upon his symbolic costume. Thus wealth became consecrated to heavenly service, and commerce was elevated into a means of grace.

Of what avail was it to a loving woman to love this man now crusted with a selfishness as hard as it was impressive, through which her love might as well hope to pierce as for the sun to penetrate the Pyramids? These must be turned upside down before the god of day can enter them; and he must go through like process if he should ever come to hold and deserve a woman's love. He

must sacrifice himself before he can be true to her. But there was that in him which rejected all notion of self-sacrifice; or rather that demanded the offering of his better nature to the gods who delighted in the offerings of molten metals as did their prototypes in burnt flesh. So, when Sarah Armstrong needed Robert Warner most, he most neglected her.

It is well known in Masston that old Buckle, as Joseph Buckle, Esquire, was called, left a splendid lot of money, and an equally splendid business to his son John, or Master John, as he was always called. But Master John, with all his fine education at the university and his diamond rings and horses, was a fool, and knew no more about business than business knew of him. He was equally deficient in his knowledge of men and the world. He was glad to be in the midst of both; and he was courted not for that which he had not, but for that which he had. His principal courtier was Lord Francis Elbston, a cousin

of Lord Limethorp, who owned much land in Masston, and all the land on the west side of it. An infamous transaction on the part of Lord Francis compelled that young nobleman to quit England. Master John Buckle was concerned in that infamous transaction which need be no further referred to now except to inform the reader that our Masston hero, Mr. Warner, was not only cognisant of the whole affair, but was likewise placed in charge of old Buckle's house of business under his own name, was likewise the propounder of a plan for resuscitating the fortunes of the youthful nobleman and his young master, as well as for providing for his own.

Master John Buckle and Lord Francis Elbston became secret partners of Robert Welsher Warner, in the Oxford Works, in our town of Masston.

When, therefore, we have the combined forces of religion, aristocracy, and commerce aiding a young man to get on in the world,

who is possessed of a handsome person and a genius for commanding success, we shall not only have no need for resorting to the invisible part of the universe for help or explanation in the matter of Mr. Warner's sudden and great triumph; no reasonable person will longer be surprised thereat.

"Good morning, sir; may I ask you to be kind enough to tell me where I can find Mr. R. W. Warner?"

"I am Mr. Warner," was the reply, and the words though few were bland, and the mode of delivering them courteous.

"Dear me, sir. I had really no idea that I should find in Mr. Warner a combination of youth as well as talent. I had no such idea—none—none in the least. I—I—really am confused—delighted—astonished."

"To whom have I the pleasure of speaking?" inquired Mr. Warner not unnaturally.

"My name is Birtles," replied the other—"of the firm of Bright, Birtles, & Brush—the

three B.s, you know, of Bristol. Eh, Mr Warner, the three B.s—always bright—always right, sir—right, that is, straight—straight—down on the nail, sir, and no mistake."

The speaker of these words was a round, jolly-faced, happy-looking fellow, very well dressed in West of England cloth, with a red face—made red not by brandy, but by fresh air, and, perhaps, Devonshire cream and Somersetshire cider added thereto. He had encountered Mr. Warner at the front entrance of the Oxford Works, whither he was bent on very important and very unusual business. It was the magnitude of the business that made Birtles express his surprise so warmly at finding the head of the renowned Oxford Works so young.

"Let us proceed inside," observed Mr. Warner to Mr. Birtles, and the latter, with the solemnity of entering a church, raised his hat, and did as he was bid.

When they reached Mr Warner's room

Birtles felt perfectly awe-struck. Marching down an aisle of well-dressed young men, all engaged in writing, the two ascended not more than eight or ten wide marble steps, guarded on each side with gold-coloured railings of exquisite workmanship, the design for which was taken from a Florentine palace.

As Warner reached the upper step, the door leading to the room opened as if of itself; he then turned round to face the clerks, whom he saluted with "Gentlemen, good morning." For a moment all pens ceased writing, and twenty or thirty well-combed heads bowed down as if in worship. This was the daily ceremony at the Oxford Works, conducted by Mr. Warner. In another moment the pens were at it again, and Mr. Birtles entered Mr. Warner's room in a mightier surprise than ever. When the business which now brought him to Masston was first made known to him, it almost took away his commercial breath. Now that he beheld the great Oxford Works,

and the room in which its master carried on his business, not only his commercial breath again gave way, but the natural breath of his body failed him. He was, perhaps, inclined to apoplexy. The room was not grand, but it was of a sacred order of architecture; the carpet might have been taken from within communion railings; the fire-place seemed to Birtles more like an altar-piece than any fire-place he had ever seen before; and the window, which looked into the great yard, or quadrangle, as some of the clerks called it, was of stained glass, carrying highly-coloured portraits of the Apostles. All the furniture was to match. "That chair. Oh yes, it was designed by her Grace the Duchess of Sunny-land." There was nothing in the room that did not attract a pleased and surprised notice, and everything was a pattern from which you could buy a hundred dozen copies if you liked, from the steel pens on the beautiful metal table, the table itself, down to the brass fire-

irons, up to the gorgeous gold-coloured cornice, and down again to castors, screws, hinges, springs, gold-headed nails, delightful knick-knacks and kickshaws, all being patterns of things made in the Oxford Works, and made to do a silent inviting duty to all beholders.

"My *dear* sir," ejaculated Birtles, "this is—all this—is the poetry of business. Who says there's no poetry in trade? Why, where would poetry be but for trade? and, Mr. Warner, I congratulate you, sir, I congratulate you. You do not, you cannot, know why I congratulate you. You are a great man, sir, but you will be greater yet. You do not know how great you are, sir."

Mr. Warner, who was standing with one arm resting on the mantlepiece and his left hand in the folds of his waistcoat, made no visible or audible reply to all this blustering and excited compliment. He knew the firm of Bright, Birtles, & Brush as well as he knew

anything, and he simply inquired, with great gravity and in his best tones, "Is the West flourishing, Mr. Birtles, as much as ever?"

"Flourishing, my dear sir, is no word for it. We are positively dying of too many good things, like tame rabbits in clover. But it is not the West, Mr. Warner, that is flourishing merely; we are flourishing all round, sir. Down from there and up to here, we are flourishing like the green bay-tree, my dear sir."

As Birtles pointed with his finger down to the centre of the earth as he used that excited expression, Mr. Warner only smiled and revolved his face as if he were describing a note of interrogation.

"Well, my dear sir, let us be calm," replied Birtles. "Let us, as I say to Mrs. Birtles when she spys the bishop coming up the lawn to tea, let us be calm. The question is this, can you, Mr. Warner, turn out for Bright, Birtles, & Brush, within a reasonable short

time, say twenty thousand pounds worth of your own admirable goods? When I look around and see the magnificent appliances you have here, the order, the command, I may say the beauty and strength of the Oxford Works, with you, my dear sir, for their directing mind —their master mind, I might very properly say—I feel sure that you can do the thing for us. I give you no particulars, make something of everything, put your best foot foremost, sir, try at something new, if you like, for the place and the occasion. The Australias are stretching out their hands to us, my dear sir, filled with gold, and hungering and thirsting for beauty and elegance in exchange. Quick, despatch, Mr. Warner. We can make you great, while we make ourselves rich, if you will, with the ardour, the intelligence, and the skill which I see displayed here. Comply with our request. Bright, Birtles, & Brush are all there, Mr. Warner, if you are; now, what do you say?"

"I am quite ready, sir," modestly spoke Warner.

"I thought so," said the other.

Birtles' manner then suddenly changed to a solemn and slow one, as if he were about to proceed through a private religious ceremony. He placed a chair at the table, he sat down, and with his own pen, which he took from one waistcoat pocket, after dipping it in a peculiar ink-horn which he carried in the corner of the other, he wrote out a cheque for £10,000.

"This cheque, Mr. Warner, I shall deposit in the bank of Messrs. Battwood & Bunce, of Masston. On the day after the receipt of invoice of goods to this amount, you will receive our order to draw at sight for that sum. The other £10,000 will be forwarded from Bristol in the usual way, five per cent. off for bills of three months,—should prefer to make it six months, but the three B.s are not screws, Mr. Warner; and as we are

anxious for despatch, we must pay something for it of course. Let me have the pleasure of wishing you all success."

Here Birtles raised his hat from the table. put it on his head, in order to lift it at Warner, —a ceremony on which he greatly prided himself,—shook hands with the master of the Oxford Works, and took his leave amid a profusion of politeness.

All that Warner said was: "Your orders shall have our best attention." He then opened the door of his room, stood on the step till Birtles reached the far-off door at the other end of the warehouse, and then made a profound bow to the great Bristol merchant.

Warner, as he returned to his room, placed himself in an attitude expressive of devout and exalted gratitude. He felt himself to be a favourite of heaven. He thus continued for a brief space, when he was disturbed by an apparition that positively overcame him, and

the effect it produced on his face was that of a person in a religious ecstasy.

The attentive reader will have noticed how, as if of itself, the door of Mr. Warner's room opened when he and Birtles mounted the last of the marble steps. By a mechanical contrivance, the pressure of a plate in the step was made to serve for opening the door. If the spring were left unchecked inside, any person standing outside on the step would make the door to slowly turn on its hinges. As Robert Welsher Warner was in the act of raising his animated face to heaven, a lady stood on the marble step,—the door opened, and Edith Ascham stood face to face with the master of the renowned Oxford Works.

He offered her the Duchess' chair.

CHAPTER IV.

"Alas! how easily things go wrong—
A sigh too much or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again."

—G. MACDONALD.

THIS world could be changed in a single night from what it is, if all the men and women who live in it would to-morrow cease to talk on anything they know nothing about. But with so much power in their hands, men will not use it, nor perhaps would lovely woman allow them. For one thing, the world would become too dull, and for another, the most talkative part of it, would be deprived of the only means they possess of knowing their own minds. Many of the best talkers are as ignorant of what is in them, and what is about to come out of them, as are those who listen for the coming sentences; and if any happy phrase or

form of sound words should cause surprise in a mixed company where are some good talkers, the surprise will surely be mutual. The lady whom we saw disturb Mr. Warner's devout attitude was one of those on whom the gift of speech had been liberally bestowed. Talk was a luxury to her; it had likewise become a necessity. Miss Ascham could also be silent, as we shall see, but at present she was in the full bloom of her talking period.

When that new-fangled door opened, as it seemed of itself, and revealed to the lady a person apparently in the act of religious thanksgiving, and that person none other than the one whom she had come on purpose to talk with on serious, and to her momentous, questions, she could not help feeling a sweet kind of happiness that disclosed itself in a blush.

She did not apologise for the interruption, which, in a lady of her excellence, could only be accounted for by a strong feeling possess-

ing her that for the moment made her superior to ordinary good manners. She gave her hand to Mr. Warner,—she accepted with a beauteous smile the chair which he offered her. And unconsciously, but none the less really, Edith Ascham, there and then, gave herself to Robert Warner. All consciously, Robert Warner, there and then, resolved that this pre-eminent beauty should be his wife.

"O Mr. Warner," she began, after taking the offered chair, "do you not think that sometimes, in a mysterious way, people are brought together for very special and extra-ordinary purposes?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied that highly favoured being.

"Yes; for instance, Mr. Gadso came to us knowing nothing of us, and we flocked to him with all our hearts. It is very wonderful. I came to you this morning by a strange impulse —I mean, that I started to come as if I were carried by a spirit, but, on my way here with

my sister and Mr. Gadso, I as suddenly became tormented with doubts. Then when we came inside your great works, the first impulse returned, I came and stood on your doorstep, and the door opened of its own accord." This was all the explanation she was equal to. At this moment came a knock at the door.

"There," exclaimed the impetuous lady, "the door does not open to them as it did to me; it is very wonderful."

Mr. Warner rose, and released unobserved, with his foot, the check of the spring, which he had put down after Miss Ascham's appearance; the door opened, and in came the Reverend William Gadso, and Miss Ascham's sister.

"Oh, there you are," observed the former in a tone of great familiarity; but then Mr. Gadso was married. "Pray, have you submitted your schemes to Mr. Warner? How do, Mr. Warner," continued the reverend gentleman; "the Lord hath much people in this city." The smile which accompanied these words

was simply divine. A divine's smile, in fact; not only a work of art of the highest kind, but of an inherited art, the power of which makes nature jealous, while it gives a perfect triumph to grace.

"I have told Mr. Warner nothing as yet. How many things in this life happen to us which seem to be only delightful dreams," said Miss Ascham in meditative tones.

The Oxford Works had become famous in Masston among its elect inhabitants, as a place where prayer was wont to be made. A religious atmosphere pervaded the great shop, religious meetings were frequently held there, and on Saturday afternoons what was known as the clerical meeting, that is, an assemblage of the clergy of Masston, was now frequently held in Mr. Warner's private room. The well-known participation of the master of the Oxford Works in these religious activities brought him to Miss Ascham's notice. It was Mr. Robert W. Warner who suggested this,

designed that, and organised the other new form of Christian cultivation. He appeared to her fervid imagination as the very architect which the times required to build the new temple of God.

Edith Ascham was the daughter of an ancient race whose inherited associations belonged all to Masston. She and her younger sister were the last of her name. Awakened out of the torpor in which she had been born by new sounds and sights, newer than she had ever seen or dreamed of, she conceived it to be her duty to devote herself and her great wealth to the moral and religious improvement of her now numerous and swarming neighbours. Unknown to her, those abounding but neglected labourers had been busy piling up gold for her. While she was a child, skipping on a grassy lawn three centuries old, the little children of Masston were helping to make that lawn, and many another field and paddock of the Aschams, worth a hundred times as much

in money value as they were when her father, Sir Roger Ascham, died. For many a day and many a year, while she was fast asleep in a delightful bed in a pannelled room, the Green Dragon was growing in fatness, the Red Lion in might, the Tiger in strength, fed on the brains of sinful men, and the wasted bodies of sinless children.

These public-houses belonged to Edith Ascham. When she came of age, only a few years before her visit this morning to Mr. R. W. Warner, those fierce animals named above represented a vast sum in the current coin of the realm.

She was a convert of the Reverend William Gadso. But if Edith Ascham had given her imagination and her acquired knowledge to a low church party, she reserved her ancestral pride and her heroic nature for other uses. Not even Mr. Gadso himself had the least control over her when she had resolved on doing a thing. She once told him, "You

argue like an angel, and yet you can act like a hen," and ever since that dear clergyman had been at her feet. It was not conceit, nor irreverence, nor yet the restless desire to be uncommon, which has unsexed more women than it has spoilt men, but it was the descent to her from her masculine ancestors of that honour, clock to itself that knew the true minute when to strike.

And yet we find this lady carried away with religious enthusiasm, even as a fair country maid had been led captive by the strength of human love, about to become just as much the victim of a fraud as was that country maid. "It is very wonderful," to use her own phrase. The secret of this infatuation lies in the imprudence with which certain elevated natures accept for facts what are clear deceptions, unable to discern the difference between an artfully-concealed spring, made by human artifice, and what they are pleased to call a special providence. It lies in the

familiarity with which the most exalted names are taken upon human lips, and the most sacred things are grossly handled by human fingers. Who shall say that there is not yet another meaning, and a deeper, which only the readers of this moving story shall be able to discover?

"I should so like, Mr. Warner, to be present at your next annual feast of the Oxford Works," exclaimed Miss Ascham.

"Oh, most certainly," replied Mr. Warner.

She had kept her seat all this time in the Duchess's chair, reclining in an easy attitude, which expressed confidence, repose, and the absolute absence of all uncertainty and doubt. As she thus sat she was a lady for a warrior to kiss, who had won her love by noble deeds and a life of devotion; or one for a hero to swear by, or to excite an oath in his breast, that no other woman but this should have his love.

Mr. Warner's ways and speech were excellent. He, too, was thoroughly at ease, and a peculiar smile rested on his face, it was not

confined to his lips, it shone in his blue eyes; it seemed to play on his white and massive forehead, to mingle with the deep carmine of his cheek, and enter the locks of his black hair.

"Would you like to go over the works?" Mr. Warner inquired in a deep but modest tone of voice, which was meant to be impressive, imperative, and yet inviting.

"I should like it of all things," said Miss Ascham, and so said Mr. Gadso.

"The Duchess of Sunnyland has been here several times, has she not?" inquired Julia Ascham, a very pretty girl, but not at all given to religion; "what does she come for?"

"What do you come for?" inquired her sister, not sharply but in a gentle tone of voice.

"I came because you asked me to come, but am now so tired that I wish you would take me away."

"Stay with me a little while, sweet Ju, I

shall have so much to tell you when we drive home."

"If you will promise to talk to me all the way home, I will stay."

"Then I promise. Will you tell my sister, Mr. Warner, why the Duchess of Sunnyland visits the Oxford Works?" This she said with a deprecating smile.

"She orders many things from us,—she sends us many commissions and designs,—she takes great interest in art. She is not only the first lady, but the first person who has discovered that a beautiful object in common use among common people may have a great and even an elevating mission."

Miss Ascham was all attention to this very inaccurate speech of Mr. Warner. She did not question the libel on all the world but the Duchess,—she took it for granted to be true.

"Surely," she remarked, "that is very unsound. Mr. Gadso, do you approve? Do you think, for instance, that if the common

brown jug used among the working-classes were to be exchanged for an Etruscan vase, it could be said to have 'a great and even an elevating mission'?"

"I do think," answered Mr. Gadso, putting himself into an attitude, "that if the utensils of the poor were to be so improved in design that they could be inscribed with texts, good would come of it. By the by, Mr. Warner, that is an idea for you. I do think you could, here and there, supply scrolls, — scrolls for ornament to carry appropriate passages of the Divine Word. On your bedsteads especially, on your door-plates, on the handles of keys, on candlesticks; how blessed, for example, might it not be, if you could make an inkstand, the border of which would be of filigree, with the words wrought in in metal, 'Thou God seest me'!"

"Ah!" responded Mr. Warner in a sigh of deep emotion.

"And you know, Miss Ascham," continued

the clergyman, "as we had it in our last parlour lecture, this was really a custom of the Jews in their best days. The Greeks always wrote on their walls words of wisdom. The Persians and the Moors delighted to inscribe the most precious and sacred phrases on the prominent parts of their public buildings. 'Beware of dogs,' you remember my sermon on that text, which was really a common inscription on the walls of Athens in the time of St. Paul, and that is a case in point."

"This is highly important," Mr. Warner remarked.

"'Dith," said Julia, clinging very close to her sister so as not to be overheard, "don't you think it is much more 'important' what is put into the jug of the poor than the shape of the jug, or the stuff the jug is made of?"

"That is very good of you, Julia," said her sister, "but remember that goodness only comes after wisdom."

Julia remembered no such thing, but it

sounded all right, and Mr. Gadso said that it was so. Some of us know that this is the very reverse of being right, and that it is all wrong; but this was the sounding brass to which Masston for its sins was condemned to listen, and which by means of very cheap literature and active charitable ladies, too well off to know anything for themselves, it came ultimately to believe.

Miss Ascham, her sister, and Mr. Gadso, conducted by Mr. Warner, had now reached the chief workshop where the skilled artizans of the Oxford Works carried on their labours. On the door leading into this room was a notice to the effect that there was "No admittance on any pretence whatever."

"Should we come in here?" inquired the younger sister of the other, who had observed the notice.

"I suppose," replied Miss Ascham, "that Mr. Warner knows we shall not steal any secrets, and that we are to be otherwise trusted."

"No person," repeated Miss Julia, "on *any* pretence."

"Observe," remarked the clergyman, "we have no pretence to be here; the notice therefore does not concern us, and besides, we are invited to come by the master who issued the order, and who can when he pleases revoke it." Mr. Gadso was anxious about Miss Julia.

"Is this for sale?" inquired Miss Ascham of an intelligent workman who was burnishing the rim of a great metal vase.

"No," replied the man, "this is for the Duchess of Sunnyland."

Miss Ascham ceased to take any interest in the object on which the man was employed, and carelessly passed on to another workman whose appearance was more remarkable than that of the other. He was a meek-eyed man, with thoughtful, but small features, and his fine linen sleeves were as well washed and dressed as her own. He, too, was occupied on a piece of workmanship as uncommon as the other.

"Is this also for the Duchess of Sunnyland?" Miss Ascham inquired, with a good-natured smile, and a little playful banter.

"Yes, it is, ma'am," the man answered, looking up at the lady, and adding, "Do you know the Duchess? we would do anything for her."

"I only know the Duchess of Sunnyland by name," Miss Ascham said, wishing all the time in her heart that these men might one day be as easily led by her as at present they appeared to be influenced by the popular Duchess.

The workman went on with his work as one who evidently thought that a person, however striking at first sight to look at, who did not know the Duchess of Sunnyland except by name, could not be worth much. He knew the Duchess, had shaken hands with her, and, what is more, she was a friend of his.

The room in which these skilled workmen

were occupied was as spacious as a chapter-house. Each man had as much space in which to do his work, and as much convenience as a canon when in council: even as much comfort—a table, a chair, a window, and a certain allotted room, all to himself. But the men themselves were more impressive than their workshop. Grave, active, full of life and intelligence, as obedient as soldiers, and as free as heroes, these skilled working-men of Masston impressed Miss Ascham as she had never been impressed before with two things, namely, that she did not know what working-men were made of, and it was not for her to do anything for their improvement. She was ashamed of herself—she regretted her visit to Mr. Warner—what would he think of her. How happy she was that she had said nothing to him regarding the real purpose of her visit? Those workmen appeared to despise her. She could never be of any use in a world where such men as

these were content to be workmen. It was the first time in Miss Ascham's life that she had seen a score of first-rate working-men engaged at their callings. She had seen a carpenter or two mending a window-frame, a blacksmith swinging a hammer in a village smithy, or a solitary knife-grinder or tinker by the way-side doing very dirty work, and being themselves filthy and evil-looking. It was from these she formed her judgment of the "masses of our large towns"—these were typical persons to her of the "teeming millions of the working-classes;" when, therefore, she came in direct contact with the artizans of the Oxford Works, she was properly humiliated, and not in the least glad. She could do nothing for them. Her self-imposed mission went to pieces in her own mind; the plans, whatever they might be which she had conceived for the "amelioration of the working people," as the phrase ran in her time, became as dust. As she stood at the end of the room,

her face turned from the workmen, as well as from her companions, a world of new thoughts passed before her in a moment of time, among these were envyings of the Duchess of Sunnyland and admiration for Mr. Robert Warner. What a power he possessed. What a genius for control. As she thus mused, biting the inside of her upper lip, a workman entered through a door concealed in the wall towards which her face was turned.

Through this door—rapidly opened, and as rapidly shut—she caught sight of what seemed to be innumerable human beings engaged in inflicting bodily tortures on themselves and on others—flying wheels, and swinging of arms, amid the endless confusion of rapidly moving leathern bands half a mile in length, and looking like a picture she had seen of heathen fanatics engaged in the worship of Vishnu and Sieva.

"May we go in here, Mr. Warner?" she pleaded in a tone and manner of such sweet

earnestness that, although he would, he could not refuse her; and in they went into the machine-shop.

The change was as rapid and as great as passing out of a green and pleasant country into a railway tunnel at the rate of seventy miles an hour.

Here were men as wild-looking, as black, and as forbidding as the machines they were tending; women black with oil and soot, which served somewhat to screen their skinny ugliness; and young girls, also black, turning handles, now and again with a painful swing of their bodies, which made those who saw them feel as if they were going through a process of mangling, or were being broken on a wheel. The noise was deafening.

Julia Ascham ran back into the room they first entered; the others followed. The door in the wall closed on the scene, and everybody felt as if they had emerged from a dark tunnel into the scenes of natural life.

"Julia, were you frightened, dear?" inquired her sister with solicitude.

"No, I felt as if my skin were being torn off. I could not bear it. Do go back if you like it. I will remain here."

But the elder, seeing her younger sister's blanched face, tenderly took her by the arm and led her away. The leave-taking was short and abrupt. No words passed between Miss Ascham and Mr. Warner, but they both shook hands warmly.

Mr Gadso remained behind with the master of the Oxford Works.

An open carriage was waiting outside for the two sisters, and the coachman was ordered to drive home.

The elder sister placed her arm round the younger's waist, who, being thus comforted and supported, remarked, "Edith, I believe you would venture down a coal pit." To which the other replied with great calmness—

"I have long thought of going to see what it is like."

"Why do you have such longings. Suppose I was to long to sweep the kitchen chimney, would you let me do it?"

"Do you know, darling, that I should be proud of you?"

Here Julia forcibly released herself from Edith's embrace, as if the dread of being turned into a sweep had restored her strength, and she answered with vigour—

"You would be proud to see me mount a fire-grate—put my head into the dark hole! You would stand by and see my feet disappear up the dreadful, smoky, horrible chimney, down which I should be sure to fall in less than five minutes?"

"I should be very proud to see you willing to sweep a chimney. I would not let you kill yourself. You should be shown how to do it. Even to sweep a chimney requires much instruction to do it well; and unless you

were properly taught when compelled to go up you would certainly fall down, and, no doubt, be killed. Such things have happened even in our own house."

"O Edith! I am sure these things are not intended for us to talk about. How much nicer it was when Lord Francis used to come, and you and he, and I, and a lot of others played, and rode, and laughed in the fields all day; and at night we sang, and did all sorts of things, and had no long family prayers. Shall we ever have any more fun again, I wonder?"

"See, Julia, sweet, this is what I am going to have put on the grave-stone of the poor little sweep who was killed in our house:—'Here lies the body of Timothy Pim; who was murdered at Baston Hall while doing his duty. Born April 2nd, 1793; killed April 3rd, 1800. This stone is erected by Edith Ascham of Baston Hall to his memory.'"

Then followed the Ascham crest and legend in barefaced English, "I stand for justice."

"Why," inquired Julia, in a somewhat frightened voice, "do you put our crest and motto?"

"Because," replied her sister, "the murder, as I call it, was done in our house. The Aschams have other deeds ascribed to them inside the church, and this will be a set-off."

"What makes you say that Timothy Pim was murdered at the Hall?"

"His father beat the little fellow into the flues, where he was suffocated. The south wall of what is now my room had to be taken down before his body could be taken out. I am too big to go into these flues to clean them,—they are very foul,—must be swept soon, and from my soul, Ju, I wish you would do it. But I won't beat you if you don't, nor compel you to do it if you don't like. Am I not merciful?"

She could be even light and gay of heart in talking of the most serious things with this sister whom she loved with a tenderness and

sweetness which seemed to be derived from a superior source.

The recollection of the incident of the little chimney-sweeper slain at Baston Hall, revived the eccentric ambition of its present owner; it restored her frame of mind to its original ardour in favour of a more intimate relationship with Mr. Warner; it increased her boldness of soul, and gave more definiteness to her plans for redeeming the masses of the town from degradation and sin.

Julia, who had changed her place in the carriage, sat with her face to her sister. "Edith," she said, "now you look like what I suppose the Duchess of Sunnyland to be—very imperious,—very much like a drum-major; very much like Boadicea—like Judith, and like a delightful lady all rolled into one."

"What made you think of the Duchess of Sunnyland?"

Truth to tell she was the very object of Miss Ascham's thoughts at that moment.

"I do not know," replied her sister, "unless it be that you were thinking of her. It is very often the only reason I can give for having thoughts, that you are thinking and I am looking at you."

"I was thinking of her—am thinking of her still, and you can go on looking at me and try if you can catch my thought."

"Do you think her very beautiful?"

"Yes."

"We have never seen her?"

"Never."

"Does she know a great deal?"

"Yes, and no."

"Does she care for these workmen as you care for them? Would she sweep her own chimney for their sakes?"

"I am sure she would never dream of such a thing—am certain that she would think it beneath her."

"So think I," echoed Julia very decidedly. "Do you," she continued, "think that you will

ever get those workmen to think as much of you as they think of the Duchess, and would you be glad if they served you as willingly and devotedly as they seem to serve her ?"

"You have caught it," replied Miss Ascham ; "that is precisely what was occupying my thoughts when you last spoke."

Here the Baston carriage stopped at the great door of Baston Hall, and both ladies went to their own rooms.

CHAPTER V.

"He either fears his fate too much,
Or his desert is small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all."

—MONTROSE.

THE Reverend William Gadso, a clergyman of the Church of England, but of Irish family, birth, and education, appeared in Masston at a time which seemed prepared for his advent. He was an orator of singular excellence; we might more accurately, perhaps, say actor, but as that might to some, unable to appreciate words of praise, appear an unworthy designation, it is better to use the more indefinite name to describe Mr. Gadso's pulpit power. Mr. Gadso having hurried through service in the reading-desk changed his surplice for his college gown, made of black silk, mounted a

tall pulpit, and found himself surrounded by a cloud of human faces, two thousand in number, all eager, all willing, all bowed as the heart of one, by the influence of a common want, and a common expectation, and began with all his power of action, voice, and well-poised argument, to describe the effect of the moral law on the conscience of the newly-awakened sinner, of some of the more awful natural phenomena on the same guilt-stricken person, and to give an account, in tragic tones and gestures, of the agonies of the irretrievably lost; then his listeners were completely taken captive, and they kissed the chains in which they found themselves captives. For the space of a full hour, hard toiling people, who if they had remained at home, would have been sleeping, were not only wide awake, but transported into a region of strange and dreadful mystery; their weary bodies were charmed into delightful rest, and their minds hitherto occupied with what they should eat, and what

they should drink, and wherewithal they should clothe their children, were set aflame with heavenly fire, which burnt away their carking cares and made them feel superior to all earthly things. The people of Masston ran to his church as shoals of fish will rush to escape the pursuit of some deadly monster of the deep, their natural enemy. This, indeed, is one of Mr. Gadso's own illustrations of what he called his work in Masston. "I am a fisher of men," he delighted to say of himself, "and the fish fly to my net even as doves to their windows. This was the style of his oratory, florid, scriptural, and earnest. As these remarks concerning himself were made in confidence to his rich friends, they did not hurt his popularity. The common people, who, be it said, never came in personal contact with him, worshipped him. He was the subject of their daily talk, at least during the two or three early days of the week, and before its toil had made them forget not only him but all

things else except the painful necessities which pressed upon them. Three days more of galling burdens, and degrading labour prepared them afresh for the plastic art of Mr. Gadso.

It was not merely a fondness for profound excitement, or the greatness of Mr. Gadso, that attracted the Masston people in numbers to his church. He had converted to himself many rich people, some beautiful women, and more than two or three once scandalous, but wealthy, old men, who, through all weathers, were constantly to be found in their places in St. Paul's Church. The working-people were delighted to gaze on these royal captives chained to the triumphal car of him who had slain the tyrants which once held them in bondage. For an hour or two the rich and the poor met together, one as good as the other, and both enjoying a sense of equality which caused no inconvenience to one side, while it was a source of proud, but unostentatious, happiness to the other.

Another more remote, but none the less effective, cause of the high religious tide then rising in the town may also be reported. Not far off there lay a vast district of unmitigated foulness, which wrapped the landscape in heavy blackness, and the people in ignorance and cowardly filth. Fifty thousand men, women, and children were employed day and night in that region of flame and smoke, digging coal and ironstone out of perilous pits deep down in the earth. When not engaged in that stupefying labour, they were drinking ale—and drinking it in bestial excess. Just about the time that Stephen Jeavons was privately fighting his cocks on Sunday morning, there broke out in this infamous black country a dreadful plague, which carried off great numbers of the inhabitants every week for weeks together. Some dropped down dead like flies which had drunk of poison; others died in extreme and prolonged agony; and many, perhaps the greater number, died

through their fears. The church bells tolled daily in solemn iteration, and many persons were carried to church who would never have gone thither willingly. But then they never returned. This was the Church's harvest. It was on the flood of this terrible pestilence that the Reverend William Gadso was carried into port. As the plague of cholera infected the bodies of the people of the black country, so did the fervour of religion take possession of the souls of the people of Masston. Churches and chapels were built as fast as bricks could be made; commerce also flourished; and Masston saw with pride its borders uninvaded by the destroying pestilence, and knew that the favour of God rested upon its trade and people.

This might have been a delusion, but delusions—as a delightful authority informs us—if they are harmless, which tend to make us more happy, have always been treated with mildness by an indulgent clergy, possessed of

incomes sufficient to make them independent of worldly considerations.

Mr. Gadso was rich by the combined riches of his wife and a large congregation, who paid high prices for their pews, and he lived in one of the best houses within five miles of Masston. People were not wanting who openly attacked Mr. Gadso's practice of driving a heavy chariot twice every Sabbath-day—except on Sacrament Sundays—from his place to St. Paul's. These critics, who were evidently envious as well as bitter, would quote, with what they considered convincing force against the great clergyman, the fourth commandment of the decalogue, as they saw his carriage and pair of fine roan horses, learned in the high step, roll up to the church gates, with a man-servant outside, besides the coachman, and two maids, with Mr. and Mrs. Gadso within. But Mr. Gadso silenced these mean-spirited sticklers for the letter of a law, who knew nothing of its spirit, by declaring, in bold and splendid words,

that each man—no matter who—to his own master standeth or falleth. Who Mr. Gadso's master might be was never definitely brought home to the great body of those who believed in and followed him, and who were much less concerned with the quality of his defence than with the glorious tones and gestures in which it was delivered.

Other pleasing things belonged to this gracious and wonderful man. His manners were as delightful as his person was attractive, and some worldly-minded young men, who had the singular daring to part their hair down the middle, were often heard to declare that more women were converted by Mr. Gadso's smile than men were convinced by his arguments.

Varied and many as were Mr. Gadso's accomplishments, he knew little or nothing of the ordinary avocations of mankind. Indeed, his style of preaching, and the innocency of his life, ill fitted him for personal contact with a people compelled, through no fault of theirs,

to earn a living by making unnecessary things, and who died in that kind of service. The only definite idea that the Reverend Wm. Gadso had of the masses of Masston was that it was the will of God that they were what they were. "The poor," he would say, "ye shall always have with you." His knowledge of the Scriptures was so intimate that to him there was no occurrence in human life, no situation a man could occupy, nor accident that could befall him, but he met it with a passage from the Bible, so pat that it seemed to men as if the course of things went on for the purpose of introducing Mr. Gadso's quotations.

As this heaven-born clergyman stood that morning in the great show-room of the Oxford Works, a foreign customer in want of something new, or an American customer in search of something to copy and improve, would have fallen into the error that Mr. Gadso was the chief showman of the place. Mr. Warner they would infallibly have taken for

the clergyman. On which it is difficult to refrain from remarking, how full of gentle satire are the commonest events of our lives.

"This is the Lord's doing, Warner," Mr. Gadso said, as he threw an all-embracing glance over the magnificent room, accompanying it with a palm-like wave of his right arm.

"He has been most gracious and kind," responded the other.

This was the first time that Mr. Warner had felt that delightful sense of graceful familiarity which comes from being simply called by your surname by a distinguished man. The great clergyman had called him "Warner." He had ascribed the success of the Oxford Works to an interposition of the Divine hand, and he had been enabled to reply with an appropriate response.

If any there be who suppose that the days are over and gone when saintly priests and austere monks influenced the conduct of men

by oracular sayings concerning the will of God, we can assure them that such is not the case. What the Rev. William Gadso now said to Warner sank as deep into his soul, and produced as much effect on his will, as did the words of the fiery priests who, in the days of the Church's grandeur and power, could link the sword of a prince to a theological argument, and connect the armed bands of emperors and kings with pious but illogical conclusions.

Unknown to himself the incumbent of St. Paul's did in that morning's interview perform the marriage ceremony between Edith Ascham and Mr. R. W. Warner. This was the difference between the priests of five hundred years ago and those who now sway the thoughts of women in Masston. The first always knew what they were about, the end they worked for, and the means they used. The second know nothing of either of these important elements in human conduct; on the contrary, they deprecate a clear understanding as lead-

ing to that proud assumption which chills faith.

The Rev. William Gadso had watched Mr. Warner's career. His name was on a list which contained the names of some score or so of privileged persons, for whom, on a set day in the week, Mr. Gadso offered up private prayer, with special pleadings. On that sacred list, which no eye but that of Mrs. Gadso ever saw, the name of Edith Ascham stood next to Robert Warner's. When Miss Ascham, in tearful and anxious sympathy for the poor of Masston, came to Mr. Gadso, explained her desires and plans, and announced her intentions to spend and be spent for souls, Mr. Gadso believed that his prayers on her behalf had been approved. As he now stood before Warner in an ecstasy of joy at the thought that he too was another of his crowns, he announced to the master of the Oxford Works the bold and generous aims of Miss Ascham.

Addressing Warner, Mr. Gadso said,—his left arm hanging rigid by his side, and the thumb of his right hand resting on the third button of Warner's waistcoat, the fourth finger five buttons up,—"She has such entire confidence in your judgment, and is so persuaded of your energy, that she will confide in you to the uttermost. She came to see you this morning in order to explain. She did so quite with my concurrence; and when I told her, as I now tell you, that I have besought the Lord for you both, she had a gracious time of refreshing. I am astonished to find that she has gone away without speaking with you; but, then, her sister was taken faint. Yes, I remember now."

There was nothing in all this that approached in Mr. Gadso's mind to the union of Miss Ascham and Mr. Warner. But if the clergyman could there and then have lifted the cover from off Mr. Warner's busy brain, and seen what was going on there, he might have come

to the conclusion, albeit he seldom quoted the minor poets, that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in his philosophy. But he was so bent on the spiritual linking of these two, or their joint communion in works of charity and grace, that the other form of union never once occurred to him. It is true that if Mr. Gadso had thought that Miss Ascham might marry Mr. Warner, or that Mr. Warner had set his affections on Miss Ascham, the dear clergyman would have raised no objection. Marriages he knew, by his own case, were made in heaven, and those whom God intended to join no worm could keep asunder. Besides, he who had pleaded the sanctification of these two before the throne of grace would never have been prepared to question the propriety of their being united in the holy bands of matrimony. Miss Ascham had great wealth, Mr. Warner vast abilities. Both he believed to be children of grace. Here there was an union of forces specially

adapted for working out the designs of heaven, fulfilling the elder and the later prophecies which related to knowledge covering the earth as the waters cover the sea, and the alteration of the attitude of the Church, in spite of earth and hell, to one of triumphant glory.

The evil that men do lives after them. If any one could have informed this romantic clergyman, in general terms, of the nature of the seed he was sowing, and the abundant harvest it should yield, he would have smiled, or closed his eyes under a lifted-up forehead, wrinkled with holy contempt. But if a clear-eyed prophet had appeared before him and in definite terms told the Rev. Wm. Gadso that he was robbing a christened woman of her lover, had mentioned her name, and all the circumstances connected with the loves of Sarah Armstrong and Robert Warner, down to the latest act of that human drama, we are quite sure that so eminent a clergyman as

Mr. Gadso would have found a way of escape for himself and everybody concerned.

It would seem that the discussion of religious themes, or any kind of religious conversation, among certain of our provincial Christian friends, in which the chief speaker is earnest, coherent, and not prolix, is more suggestive than discussion or conversation of any other kind. This, perhaps, is sufficiently obvious to need any illustration; yet we may say that at one particular part of Mr. Gadso's voluble benevolence, Sarah Armstrong came and stood before the mind of Robert Warner as distinctly as the ghost of his father stood before the eye of Hamlet. The master of the Oxford Works turned pale as in rapturous words the divine spoke of Warner's success, springing, as he declared it must, from the pursuit of godliness, and of the praises of him which were in all people's mouths; and Mr. Gadso, who was accustomed to watch the countenances of men when under the spell

of his eloquence, attributed the blanched cheek of his listener to intense spiritual sympathy.

It was in reality the image of Sarah passing across the memory and whitening the visage of her traitor lover.

"Well, good-bye, Warner; the Lord bless you."

And with that—to some, sweet and holy blessing, to others withering scath—the two parted, one to his fold, the other to his merchandise.

The day had advanced. The master of the Oxford Works had yet much to think of. He retired to his room, and having closed the door, a curtain on the outside, which seemed to be self-acting, unrolled itself from the top to the bottom, entirely concealing the door from sight, and the clerks and all concerned then knew that Mr. Warner was not to be disturbed until he should summon some one.

What a day had it not been. The early dawn was covered with clouds, and chilly

doubts had floated across Mr. Warner's powerful mind. How these were changed to merry hopes by the arrival of Birtles from the three B.s of Bristol, and his cheque for £10,000, we have already seen or conjectured, as also how these hopes were solemnised and enlarged by the unexpected advent of Miss Ascham, the sweetness of her behaviour towards him, the great resolve which took possession of his soul, and finally, by the sacred communion he had been privileged to hold with one of the greatest of God's militant ministers. These were no common accidents, and if they excited wonder, delight, awe, and boundless confidence, we must remember that the times were uncommon, and men's mind had been softened to receive great impressions—

> "Behind a frowning providence,
> He hides a smiling face,"

were words which Warner had been made by a sweet compulsion to take unto himself.

Other things were brought home to him from without. The great markets of the world were then opening up. The Americas, the Australias, the Canadas, and India, were making commercial demands upon England such as had never entered into the heart of man to conceive. There was nothing which could be made in brass or iron, silver or gold, cotton or silk, or leather, which these countries did not then want, and each had millions of newly-found gold wherewith to buy what was so much longed after.

Mr. Robert W. Warner was a product of this fine excitement; he was likewise one to whom had been committed the pleasant task of keeping up and intensifying that very same excitement. By six o'clock on the evening of that singularly happy day, he had determined upon a step that should raise him higher than he had dreamed of in his brightest waking dreams. He rang his bell, the door curtain rolled itself up as if possessed with a new

energy, and the clerk in attendance entered Mr. Warner's room.

"Send to me Mr. Reklaw," was the command of the great man.

Mr. Reklaw was the general foreman and overlooker of all things and all men at the Oxford Works.

"James," said Mr. Warner to his lieutenant, "how many fresh hands have we room for?"

"We can take on, sir," was the reply, "three hundred of all kinds."

"Very well; that will make us more than a thousand. Proceed about it to-night. Empty every workshop in the town, bring all their men here, and give out all the work you can besides. What is Paul Blanchard about now?"

"Blanchard, sir, is designing a new portable iron bedstead. I am told it is to be one of the most wonderful of things; can be made for a common soldier, or for the Duchess herself; can be made of brass, even of silver, of

papier maché, or of bright steel, a thing of elegance and use combined, or for common uses merely."

It should be stated that Mr. Reklaw was known as a great speaker, was a leading spirit in the Mechanics' Institute, and a great authority on books.

"Very well," responded the master, "we must have Paul Blanchard at his own price, whatever it is. What pity is it that the man drinks so much ; we must cure him of that."

"Why, sir," replied Mr. James Reklaw, with a familiar and intelligent laugh, "if you were to cure Paul Blanchard of his passion for drink, Masston itself would be too small to hold him, and nobody's money could buy him. For a full swill of liquor you may not only get him and his brains, but his patterns as well, which I know are many. I have heard him, when he has been elevated, say things which convinces me that he knows more than a thing or two."

"James, we must not do evil that good may come; but get Paul Blanchard here by all means."

Mr. Warner then with great gravity, his thoughtful face being bent over a paper of figures, still addressing his foreman, said—"All hands must work overtime for the next three months. Double the pay for overtime in the best room. You may offer a prize of £10 for something new. Make such increase of pay elsewhere as will secure pains. Pack up for exportation every article in the show-room, and replace with all possible expedition. I will address the hands to-morrow night. That is all just now. O James, I wish to have the door leading from the designing-room into the machine-shop blocked up. Attend to that at once."

Then Mr. Reklaw went to carry out his master's instructions, and the master remained a little while longer to write the following note :—

OXFORD WORKS, MASSTON,
10*th July* 1853.

DEAR MR. JOHN,—I can supply you with £20,000 worth of the very highest class of goods, a market for which is now open in Australia. If you and Lord Francis will proceed thither, and be in readiness to receive, I will have them despatched. You will certainly be able to realise £40,000. £20,000 must be remitted to me as cost for the goods, the remainder will be divided between yourselves and the works. With care and good judgment you may realise £50,000.—I am, yours most faithfully, R. W. WARNER.

À Monsieur John Buckle,
Hôtel d'Athénes, Rue Poissonniére,
Paris, France.

Our readers will perceive that Mr. Warner's great and sublime plan was to execute the order of Birtles, send out the goods, as above, to Australia, and then furnish Birtles with a duplicate supply. He would thus be able to steal Bright, Birtles, & Brush's market, and if all things went well, to realise on both transac-

tions a profit by which he could release himself from all further obligation to Lord Francis Elbston and Master John Buckle.

The main pleasure next after the sense of the profit, which this vast idea brought to Mr. Warner, was in the thought of the great impetus to trade which his device would certainly create in Masston. There would be work for all; and what greater good can a people have or desire than their fill of work?

In Mr. Warner's room was a concealed door which led into the great yard of the works direct, without need to pass through the warehouse. The warehouse was now closed, all the hands gone, and the great gates were shut. The watchman and his great dog were, with the exception of Mr. Warner, the only people in the place. It was still light, but a drizzling rain had begun to deepen the evening shadows. Mr. Warner, with the letter in his hand, opened his private door, and on

the step outside his eyes encountered the drooping figure of Sarah Armstrong.

There she stood, immediately in front of him, neatly clad, but looking very pale, with a little posey which she held in both hands before her as if it were a prayer-book, seeming, indeed, not unlike the posey itself,—pretty, quaintly bright, but cut off from any certain source of brightness.

"What, in the name of God, are you doing there—what has brought you here? You should not come here," stammered forth Mr. Warner, bewildered, confounded, and utterly at sea. He put his hands in his pockets, remained motionless on the step, and did not advance one foot to meet her.

"O Robert, they have turned me out. I shall never go back to Russet again, and I thought I ought to come to you."

"Well, well, you must go away now; there —go somewhere—and I will see you again; but you must never come here again," and he put

some gold into her hands, which, however, did not remain there, but fell with a shriek on to the stones. "Go away, I say," the wretched man urged; "go away, I am expecting some one," and he put his hand to her shoulder, turned her face round to the gate, went himself and opened it, and Sarah Armstrong went her way into the bewildering town. She walked on with trembling limbs till she came to a flight of stone steps which led into a large, empty house, and there, having sat down, she, overcome with pain, fell asleep in the quiet rain.

Mr. Warner returned inside his room to collect his thoughts and wash his hands. The night had become cold as the rain increased, when Dr. Cumberladge, on his way home, turned the corner of the street, and saw a young countrywoman, very decently dressed, fast asleep on a flight of stone steps, with some garden and wild flowers strewn about her as if they had been thrown away. The doctor roused the sleeper, and told her, in

a gentle voice, to get up. This she did, and when he saw her face and looked well at her, he said not another word but "Come home with me," and she went in sad and solemn trustfulness.

CHAPTER VI.

"When the ear heard me then it blessed me."—Job xxix. 11.

Masston was a profound mystery to the great bulk of the people who lived in it. This could be seen at a glance by any who would take the trouble to go with those of her adventurous spirits who, once in seven years perhaps, would take a holiday, and walk three miles to see the great stone cross which stood in the centre of the little mossy village of Bysshton; or with those other daring Masston-ites who went to Ashon Church in their new suits, who carried their dinners with them in order to have a long Sunday of enjoyment in antiquarian research, or, what is more likely, of breathing fresh air, as some might imagine, or still again, to go with the little knots of

wondering souls who on Easter Mondays made pilgrimage to Baston Hall, to the Hermitage, and also to gaze on the painted pomp of the renowned forest which can now be reached from Masston in half-an-hour, but which would take a man six hours to reach on foot, in the days when Robert Warner courted Sarah Armstrong.

To watch these various groups of quiet, irregularly built men and women, as they stared at the ancient things before them, one got an impression that they were deaf or dumb; for whilst they gazed they never once opened their lips to speak to one another, but each took up his place, and assumed an unconscious attitude before the great trees, or the wonderful glass windows stained with glorious colour, or the curious stone and gilt statues of old knights and stately dames, much as if he had come to witness an execution, and were about to be let into some awful secret concerning heaven and hell. Did these people, whom the man that kept the turnpike looked at suspiciously as

they straggled and shuffled along the dusty roads, whom no one knew, or seemed to care for, visit those old churches and halls for the purpose of getting a little rest from the whirl of wheels and the din of hammers by looking on things which carried them back to the olden days when men, somehow, were different to what they are now, and the things they lived for and worked at bore some sweet and enduring relationship to the best of all things? Did the gilt statue of Sir Gower Cumberladge, in the great wide chancel of Ashon Church, give any definable pleasure to the ill-made, ill-clad people, with comfortless-looking faces, who came at all times of the year from Masston to peep at it?

This question was often debated in Masston, and still the custom prevailed, even in the worst times, of many of the poorer sort of townspeople straggling into the old country churches to look at the monuments and read some of the tables which hung from their walls.

As these poor ones made their pilgrimage to these ancient shrines along the roads beneath the blinding glory of the sun, one might have thought, so settled was their progress, so full of searching their aspect, that they were the stragglers from some vast and goodly procession of past time, who, severed from their main body, clung with sad hope of finding it to the old ways by which they were forlornly going.

Here are two extracts from one of the tables in Ashon Church chancel :—

"And in the year of Our Lord's grace, one thousand four hundred and seven, Sir Hugh Bysshe Cumberladge did give two pounds a year for ever to the poor of the parish of Mastelyn."

"Idleness being the mother of all sin, Dame Dorothy Cumberladge did leave ten pounds a year for ever for the instruction of the sons of the poor of this parish in useful handicrafts and art mysteries."

These records, which were held up to public

show in the little venerable church at Ashon, prove how intimately the Cumberladge family remained connected with the Masston people. And when to these bequests was added a real living Cumberladge and actual descendant of the great Sir Hugh, and the no less great Dorothy, resident in the very heart of Masston, it will be seen that the ties between the long past Mastelyn, and the persistently present Masston, were neither slight nor probably inoperative.

Indeed, Doctor Hugh Cumberladge, being the active administrator of the Cumberladge charities, which had increased in value with the increase of the town, it could not be otherwise than that the name of Cumberladge was deeply cherished, and the social position of him who bore it greatly enhanced in Masston. How it came to pass that a Cumberladge was reduced to the level of working for his daily bread, and working as hard as any brassfounder, in such a dirty, smoky, pent-up place as

Masston, will, no doubt, be made plain before this story comes to an end. The main fact that we are at present concerned with is, that there the good doctor was, and that his wise and compassionate heart led him to take the forlorn girl, who had sought refuge on a door-step, to his own home.

The doctor led the young countrywoman into the kitchen of his house; and as Sarah Armstrong stood before its bright fire, being also surrounded with shining pots and pans and covers, everything there seeming to yield a welcome and a healing light! she looked like a picture restored to its frame.

"Mary," the doctor said to his wife, whom he found in his own room, darning stockings, "I have brought a young woman for you to look at, and the only reason I can give you for doing so is that 'they' have turned her out of home. Who 'they' may be I cannot find out, or why 'they' should make such cruel fools of themselves is beyond my wit to discover, only

it seems to me that men get more cruel every day we live."

"Mary," who was a stately woman, here rose, and bending over her husband, now seated in his arm-chair, with his head thrown back, gave him a kiss as a lover might give his mistress a rose, and then went into the kitchen to see what probably might turn out to be some haggard wretch covered with shame, as her clothes would not fail to be covered with the filth of the gutter. She had met with such helpless ones under the very same circumstances before, and indeed, in that kitchen and at that time of night, no other such; so that her pity had acquired somewhat of a magisterial air.

As Mary—it is impossible to call this graceful and full-natured wife Mrs.—as Mary Cumberladge came into the kitchen, Sarah Armstrong was still standing in front of the clear fire, her face being lighted by its cordial warmth. An easy curtsey from the country-girl

greatly facilitated matters, and the lady began her catechism, without ceasing her darning.

"Where do you come from?"

"From Russet, ma'am."

"Why did you leave Russet?"

"They turned me out;" the voice of the speaker becoming husky as if with great thirst, and her arms dropped to her side.

The lady would not have asked why they "turned her out," but that it was part of her formulæ, so she continued—"Why did they turn you out?"

"Because of Robert Warner"— and by this time the young woman broke down completely, for the mention of this name brought to her mind that she was "turned out" not only by her own father and mother, but by the man whom she loved, and she uttered a cry like a wounded animal, and fell—not on to her knees—but with her head bowed down on to the right arm of the industrious lady, who to that moment still kept up her darning.

Now Dame Cumberladge, although still young, had great experience in dealing with such creatures as had either wilfully or by accident fallen out of their nests; but that experience stood her in no stead at this moment, for almost simultaneously with the poor girl's bursting into tears she did so likewise, and Mary Cumberladge's magisterial pity melted into divine compassion.

"Sit down, my poor one," she said, as she helped the now sorrowfully-awakened girl on to the broad oak settle which stood against the wall.

The wife then went to rejoin her husband, and as she went, Sarah Armstrong became hot with pride—her tears suddenly dried up of themselves, and the salt which they left behind them produced a bitter smarting, which roused her from her abject state—and she arose, went straight to the door, raised the great iron latch with a noise, and was ready to fly from the house, not to him who should

have been her husband, not back home, for home she had now none; but anywhere out of the world.

"Why, Hugh," said Mary Cumberladge, as she entered the doctor's room, "she is"——and the wife whispered something in her husband's ear and again broke into soft tears, chiefly because she knew that for the woman she had just left there should be many tears, and all full of salty bitterness. "She is so pretty," the lady of grace continued, "and Hugh, she is thoroughly good, and looks wonderfully sensible."

Doctor Cumberladge catechised his wife as she had catechised the young countrywoman; and when he was thoroughly possessed of her story, late as it was he rose from his comfortable chair, returned the kiss his wife had given him an hour ago, went into the kitchen and found, to his vexation, that the fellow-creature who had excited his helpful pity had fled away."

"She must be still in the yard, Hugh," said his wife, who by this time had, of course, been applied to, "for the outer door is locked, and here is the key."

And there the girl lay on the stone flags, close to the great dog-kennel in the corner, and "Trusty," its equally great tenant, had turned out, and was lying on the same cold flags close by the fallen girl's side, as if he knew that some creature more noble than himself was in need of such warmth as he could supply.

"My God!" exclaimed Doctor Cumberladge in a voice of fervent worship, as he beheld that sight, and then he added, "Trusty, thou shalt have a silver collar for this."

That night did Sarah Armstrong sleep at the Hermitage Farm, which is seven miles from Masston, and so did Doctor Cumberladge who carried her thither in his own whiskey. Three months afterwards she became the mother of a son, and Mary Cumberladge, who

was a woman of all-powerful sympathy, she too brought forth her fifth on the very self-same night as did Sarah Armstrong her first-born.

Now the doctor had a project, which was somewhat disconcerted by these simultaneous events, but he bore his disappointment like one not unused to chastening.

"Mary," said the doctor to his wife, "Sarah shall nurse our Dolly."

"And who, pray, is to nurse Sarah's boy?" inquired the wife-mother.

"I," said the doctor, with a broad intelligent look that lighted up his whole face, "am going to kill that brat, in order to set its young mother's heart free, and provide for our own bairn!" and he placed the forefinger of his right hand on his lips and laughed as if he were joking.

The Doctor procured that Sarah Armstrong's child should be christened with the names of "Hugh Warner;" after that the child was taken by him, and placed out at

nurse in a country house, not far off, where it was to grow, if it could, and as much as it liked, and Sarah returned to Masston and nursed the newly-arrived daughter of her protector and mistress.

One day Dame Cumberladge asked Sarah what tidings of her boy.

And Sarah replied, "The master has told me that he is dead, and that I am not to cry."

"Hugh," demanded his wife, when she first saw her husband alone after that sad announcement, "how dare you say that Sarah's child is dead?

"Does she think him to be dead?" inquired the doctor.

"Firmly."

"Then let her believe it for ever. I had simply told her that 'he was better off'—meaning that he was better off than he could be by being with her; and she has construed the phrase into the common meaning which is attached to it by our country neighbours.

Encourage her in this. It will be for everybody's good—chiefly her own; doubtless it will be for the future good of her boy, should he live. I will make this plain to you at another time."

So Master Hugh Warner Armstrong got baptized into an irreconcilable enmity with him who was responsible for his appearance in the world, and it is very likely that Dr. Hugh Cumberladge did not fully know what he was doing, when he gave Sarah Armstrong's unofficial son his name, together with ample means of growing into the stature and comeliness of a man.

There are some actions in life, the consequences of which it is the bounden duty of a man to be fully aware. This surely was one. And the doctor appeared to have no misgivings. How he came to lend himself to so unnatural an impulse as that of separating a mother from her child—a child from its mother—can only be attributed to the state of things then prevailing

in Masston, the peculiar nature of the mother herself, and perhaps some purpose of justice and mercy combined which he fully explained to his wife, who was induced to submit to a transaction against which the instincts of her nature rose in revolt.

CHAPTER VII.

My love for you is warm, is deep,
My love for you can never sleep.
Those were the words you spoke to me—
What fiend sits where your heart should be?

To say that Mr. Warner was not taken aback at the sudden sight of Sarah Armstrong when he encountered her on his door-step would be untrue, and therefore that cannot be stated in this veracious history. He had finished his day's labour, and was on his way home when he opened the concealed door of his room. His return to wash his hands after contact with the child-woman whom he turned away proved, if it proved nothing else, that he had been taken aback. But in the brief space of that cleansing operation, he had collected his thoughts, and, so to speak, washed his hands of everything connected with the simple woman from Russet. It

might be said that as he dried them, he wiped away the last saving stains of remorse which, to one who had received such sound doctrine as Mr. Gadso preached, together with such splendid opportunities as a supremely fine luck had thrown in his way, were simply matter out of place. As if to show that he had no fear of exposure, annoyance, or damage to his fame, he sat down and wrote out the heads of a discourse he intended to deliver to the workmen the next evening in accordance with his instructions to his foreman. Or, it might be that Warner knew enough of Sarah Armstrong to warrant the conviction that she would never trouble him. Cruelty is not always blind, nor always in a rage, but sometimes sees before and after with great distinctness the weight and force of its acts.

Still, it shows that Masston must have terribly changed when an occurrence such as that of Sarah Armstrong being turned out of her home, caused no noise nor gave occasion

for much talk or controversy. It also shows that the master of the Oxford Works knew what he was doing.

Where were Stephen Jeavons and Benjamin his son all this time? Where was the parson of Russet who knew Sarah well? She had many friends and acquaintances. Where were they? Was there none among them all to wag one poor tongue, or lift up one feeble voice, for an explanation of Sarah Armstrong's sudden disappearance from a home which was one of the brightest in all that country side?

The answer is, Not one.

"She had gone to Masston." That is all that was said, and that was all that people required to help them to account for one of the deadliest disasters that can overtake a human life.

During the three months which elapsed between the heroic conduct of the dog Trusty, and the unheroic achievement at the Hermitage Farm, Masston had been in a fever of work.

The vast orders of the three B.s of Bristol, and those which Mr. Warner had given to himself, were not the only causes of the ceaseless busyness then proceeding; orders for every product of Masston came pouring in from all parts. The town was full of strangers who had come to give orders, and wait to see them executed. Orders for tea trays and doll's eyes by the million. Eyes with hooks to them, pins, pens of steel, and patent bedsteads, nails, screws, coffin-plates, and finger-plates for doors, locks, church furniture, and stew pans, kettles and coffee-mills, and every description of thing that is made in iron, brass, and tin; all the superior things invented and made at the Oxford Works. To say nothing of such inferior things as imitation gods for India, glass opals for Ceylon, antique coins for Egypt, brass rings sicklied over with a pale cast of silver for Africa, spurious jewellery and toys of every conceivable sort for every conceivable part of the opening universe.

And in those three months much progress had been made in other matters. The streets of the town presented spectacles of an unusual nature. Could Dame Dorothy Cumberladge have returned from the eternal mansions, she would, no doubt, have put in strong claims for the practical carrying out of some of the proverbs of Solomon. She would have bearded the church authorities, and used a birchen rod on many a hussy's back, and sent her home. What the Grand-dame would have done, when she found that the hussies had no home to go to, it is hard to tell. It is likely that she would seek consolation in the words of despair, and have done nothing but exclaim, "Everybody has forsaken God, and gone mad."

As Dame Dorothy did not come, we can go on with the story. The lanes and fields of the suburbs were no less striking in their appearance than the streets of Masston. Great numbers of foreign men of all nations were to be seen walking there in apparently happy

intimacy with showily-dressed girls, of no ill manners, of all ages and complexions, all good-looking, and not a few of striking beauty of form and features. This, however innocent, intercourse of Masston young women with strangers, who appeared to possess unlimited means and ample leisure, gave rise to many new forms of life and enterprise in Masston. Gaudy shops, whose windows were tricked out with foreign finery, made the old streets new with gaiety by day, and gilded saloons for the sale of attractive liquors gave a charm to the night. In brief, the town was never so busy, trade never so flourishing, or money so plentiful.

No one, of course, is so foolish as to doubt that free trade is the pioneer of liberty and freedom, or that commerce is the true Elias of the glad tidings of a better life. In a general way that must be true, because it is the freely-expressed opinion of all our statesmen, an axiom of the House of Commons, and there is

not a newspaper printed anywhere in the English language that dare say otherwise. And yet, so far as Masston was concerned, it is as false as tossing with a double-headed farthing.

And yet it is true.

The town was never so busy, trade never so good, or money so abundant, and the utmost liberty did prevail, and freedom went almost naked, and everybody seemed to be glad for some great joyful news.

Edith Ascham was glad.

The orders of Bright, Birtles, & Brush had been duly executed. The orders in duplicate for the combined profit and advantage of Mr. Robert Welsher Warner and his associates were already despatched, and an assurance on the goods to their full value taken out, so that the master of the Oxford Works, influenced by that divine freedom and most perfect liberty which spring from a flourishing trade and extended commerce, ventured closer and closer to the great

lady of Baston Hall. She likewise had, several times since the last time we saw her there, visited the Oxford Works, always with the sister still in the darkness of a natural life. Mr. Gadso likewise invited Mr. Warner to his place to the parlour lecture, which privilege was reserved for the aristocracy of his congregation, and the rich old ladies who were too infirm for anything more exciting than a religious service that could be immediately followed by a cup of tea.

At this parlour lecture everybody was expected to say something, and if any were silent Mr. Gadso would, in the most fascinating way, worm something out of them, which would enable him to gauge their spiritual condition or the position they occupied in the kingdom of God. There was nothing inquisitorial about it, or sour, or, when you once got used to it, awful. To many it was a heavenly treat.

On the occasion of the visit of the great master of the Oxford Works, when he was what

might be called received into that special communion, all eyes were turned upon him as he proceeded to show a new meaning of "Be ye therefore perfect." His exposition was luminous and original. His rich voice penetrated many a heart, and Mr. Gadso, at the end of Mr. Warner's remarks, added not a word, and would not disturb the sacred influence which had proceeded from Mr. Warner's lips otherwise than to say, "Let us pray."

It was then that Miss Ascham was effectually drawn to Mr. Warner. She stayed to tea—so did the great tradesman—and they all had a time of delightful refreshing.

In this way did what might be called the courtship of Mr. Warner and Miss Ascham proceed. She knew he loved her—she was certain that he loved God. That was her security, and she confided in Mr. Gadso's guidance, and trusted his judgment.

The evening before the meeting related above, she and Mr. Warner had met in her own

house, where there had been some good people to dinner, including several of the clergy. Some most sweet moments were passed. Prayer, and a little wine, and pleasant fruits, and pictures, and other products of the gentle arts, including music, had helped to make all of one mind. And Warner, who was a master of opportunity, approached, nearer than he had ever done before, the question which Miss Ascham was now willing should be put to her.

She, in fact, decided for herself that night. Truth to tell, with all her natural firmness, her strong will and thorough breeding, she was a little inclined to be impulsive, and although she thoroughly hated this failing in others, she undoubtedly now and then gave way to it herself. It sprang from the sweet tenderness of her regenerated heart Mr. Gadso said.

Warner was cautious. He felt tolerably firm, for was not the God of Jacob his refuge? He walked down to the works, as was his custom every morning, always in evening dress, and

not a sparkle of the tiniest bit of gold ornament about his person was to be seen. He bowed to poor young men whom he knew in the Sunday-school, whom he would often meet in the street, and not unfrequently he would stop a pale-faced mechanic—pale, probably, for lack of a little earthly bread—and ask him about his soul; and he has been known to tell a sturdy beggar in the street, "Man doth not live by bread alone," much to the astonishment of the beggar and a few domestic women who overheard the saying.

Warner was always sure to find some visitor waiting for him in the show-room, as if by a special providence, on the mornings when he was a little later than usual, owing to the length of his spiritual exercises. This morning his happiness was greater than it was wont to be, owing to the certain clearness of the sky over Baston Hall. He walked along, throwing his eyes a thousand yards before him, as if he were driving a valuable span of horses that might

suddenly break away and leave him prone in that mud from which he originally sprang. On he sailed, smiling at the gilt weathercock which he had given to St. Paul's Church—smiling at the blue heavens—not a smile for all the world to behold—but that smile of content which a cautious man keeps in readiness for a sudden need, by sternly making up his mind to the fact that, happen what might, he is safe: sink who may, he knows how to swim.

There was a visitor at the Oxford Works. In that very gorgeous room which Mr. Gadso had pronounced to be the Lord's doing, which Edith Ascham had consecrated by her presence and Mr. Warner with prayer, there was waiting one, of whom Mr. Warner had often heard, but with whom he had never till now come in contact. The visitor, for one thing, did not belong to St. Paul's Church, nor was he in any way connected with the multitudinous tail of the Rev. William Gadso, and that would account for there being no knowledge of him.

"Who did you say the gentleman was?" inquired Mr. Warner of one of the clerks.

"The gentleman would not give us his name, but said that he must see you, and would wait."

"Do you know him?"

"No, sir."

Warner picked up a packet of letters of all sorts and sizes—some of them with deep black edges—and thus armed with something to look at or fall back upon, he proceeded to the show-room.

"You are Mr. Warner, I presume?"

"My name is Warner."

"My name, sir, is Hugh Cumberladge."

"Indeed!"

"You, Mr. Warner, are the father of a boy of whom Sarah Armstrong is the mother, and I the godfather. I shall require you to give me £200 a year for the next fifteen years for the support and education of this child. The mother I will take care of myself, as you have thrown her away. If the boy lives, as there is

every reason to believe he will, I shall further require of you to continue this contribution until such time as he may cease to need it. On my part, I promise to keep the secret of his being any relation of yours locked in my own breast. His mother believes him to be dead, and dead he shall for ever be to her and to you on the conditions I have named. You can send me in writing your answer to these proposals. I wish you good morning, and hope never to have any occasion to see you personally again!"

And Dr. Cumberladge as abruptly left the presence of Mr. Warner as this chapter abruptly comes to a close.

CHAPTER VIII.

"How we apples swim!"—*Old Phrase.*

Any ordinary person would have been abashed, crestfallen, and confounded by such an interview as that recorded in the last chapter between Dr. Cumberladge and Mr. Warner. But Mr. Warner was not an ordinary person. So far from being abashed, crestfallen, or confounded, he was more free and easy than ever. True, he had been troubled about Sarah Armstrong, and the trouble arose from the dead silence which surrounded her. She appeared to have gone out of the world—but no one could tell. Russet ceased to care for her. Her own people, who cast her out, had forgotten her. What was equally strange, no one, so far as he knew, took his name on their lips in con-

nection with one who was as well known as she was loved. The Armstrongs must have had their suspicions, yet they never breathed his name. That, however, was because their own cruelty had made them hard, so that they could neither do justly or see right. They were blind to everything except what they considered to be the disgrace and dishonour brought on their home and name by their own child. The neighbours held aloof: the very crops in the Armstrong fields pined away. Old Armstrong himself passed his days in looking over a gate, and refusing to open his lips to any one. It was this dead silence that alarmed Warner. He could do nothing until he were certain that the woman whom he had wronged would not come shod in velvet, at some supreme moment, and frustrate his new plan of life, or dash from his hand the cup of joy as he was raising it to his lips. But he could learn nothing, in spite of much searching and anxious inquiry. The more he searched, the keener

grew his desire. This was partly because he kept his own secret, and followed his pursuit alone, so that no one was found to draw a friendly red herring across the scent of his own raising or otherwise divert his attention; and partly because his vanity became at times so inordinate that it blinded even his eyes. So he kept dallying with his fate, or, as Miss Ascham began to think—dallying with her; and because he could get no authentic knowledge of Sarah, he wearied himself with the unauthentic tidings supplied by his own imaginings. Thus the selfish love which once possessed him for the lovely woman of Russet village became transformed into fear—the fear which has torment. He dreaded even the approach of the lady of his ambition lest that other woman, whom he had cast loose on the world, should stealthily steal in between them and ruin him for ever with the breath of her lips. He proposed nothing and thought of nothing in the matter between himself and Miss Ascham that

was not followed by that dreadful alternative being started in his quick brain.

On one occasion at Baston Hall, Warner, happy in the conviction that Edith Ascham was won, and, feeling that to the raising of his finger she would respond with her hand, said to her :—

"Would you not like to walk under the trees?"

For there was an avenue at Baston where for centuries the secrets of the world's heart had been whispered, and the place was haunted with voices. The leaves, the light which fell upon them, the shadows which climbed great outstretched branches, and the sigh, or song of the breeze, came at the touch of occult forces which could be felt but not defined. All that was known of love or hate, joy or sadness, beauty or foulness, grace or trickery, had gathered there as were gathered the devil's oatmeal or the fairy glove, the shepherd's purse or the sweet bells that never jangled, or were out of tune, with heaven. Under the solemn pillars

of that leafy chancel the lover found his tongue better than when his lips were red with wine. The maid whose heart was troubled with a delicious tremor there found strength, and that peace which comes from a profound calm, undisturbed, save by the voice of her beloved. And there to the coward and the vile was revealed the foulness of their own selves, drawn as if in livid lines on the dark walls of the prison themselves had built, and from which they could not fly.

Mr. Gadso had walked there often, and the first time, which was with Edith, who had taken him there for the purpose of asking his thoughts regarding the influence which the avenue and its purple and green lights possessed over her, exclaimed as they proceeded together through the majestic space, "How dreadful is this place, this is none other than the house of God, the very gate of heaven!"

He had filled it for her with holy and delicious things,—and who will scornfully

reproach the sympathetic man with pantheism or any such other shocking crime? Is paradise only a thing of the past, and Jacob's ladder nothing but a dream? Mr. Gadso, who knew everything, knew better.

"I will go, with all my heart," replied Miss Ascham to Warner's question, with that glorious smile which only once in her life a woman full of marriage bestows on a man; a smile ineffable and inexplicable, except to him who loves.

So they went into the wood, she taking his arm and looking in his face with the glory still on her own as they solemnly passed the great elms. As she looked, Warner's countenance changed into an expression which she interpreted into a feeling of divine awe. As for him, he was afraid to trust himself. Speak he could not. He knew full well that the beauty of the face which beamed upon him was the beauty which seeks the music and the touch of love. But, like another guilt-stricken wretch,

he heard a voice among the trees of the garden, and was afraid, or rather, which to him was quite as awful, yonder, far off, in shining garments, stood right before him Sarah Armstrong, looking like an angel, and she came bounding down the illuminated avenue towards them, smiling a most heavenly and delightful smile as she came on.

"Are you sad or thoughtful most when evening comes?" inquired Miss Ascham in a full mellow tone, suiting its sound to the words she used, and observing the dilated eyes of Mr. Warner shining out from an array of wrinkles on his broad and pale forehead.

"I am now at times," he answered, "very sad, when I find myself with you; but it is a sadness which is mingled with the greatest happiness possible to man."

She pressed his arm, and yet was there no more communion between them.

This was the second time that Sarah Armstrong had appeared to Warner, and both

times, as we have seen, when some sacred or Biblical subject had been pressed upon him. Sarah he now believed to be dead. Only the dead appear to the living as really as if they were alive. In that case she might always trouble him as she had already, coming in upon him with her happy face, whose silence and sweetness produced in him the very turbulence of chaos. He began to feel (he was saying it to himself then) that the further he went on with his suit, the more frequent would be those appalling apparitions.

When the two separated that evening the woman believed in her heart that the man would kiss her. But the man did nothing of the sort. They shook hands and departed as if they had just retired from a prayer meeting. To say that Miss Ascham was not wounded would belie the goodness of her heart. She consoled herself, however, with a chapter, a few tears, and a prayer for more grace.

When the two again met she had, by the

company and spiritual sympathy of Mr. Gadso, recovered her serenity of mind, and in Warner she discerned an altered, indeed, a transfigured, being. She had been near forming the conclusion in her own mind that she had been guilty of some unwomanly act, or that Mr. Warner had discovered that married life would hinder his great work in the world, but was unwilling to make that known to her—the fact being that she had been guilty of nothing, nor could she be guilty of anything unbecoming a lady and a warm-hearted courageous woman. But Warner, unacquainted with the ways and manners of any other world than that in which faith goes further than works, had brought himself to believe that there was nothing too hard for the Lord, that is the Lord who was advised by the Rev. William Gadso, and that He would induce Miss Ascham to throw herself at his feet for him to pick up, and place where he might chose. And so persistent was this hope in Warner, that it shaped his con-

duct; it almost produced a whisper in Miss Ascham's ear. All Warner's timidity had now vanished. The mist and the fog had cleared away, and the true lovers' sun shone high in the heavens. Warner's courage returned, and he went straight to Miss Ascham and asked her to become his wife.

She answered him by kneeling at his side, for in an almost insolence of valour he had thrown himself on to her sofa, as if the mighty effort he then made had robbed him of all strength in his legs.

She went and knelt down, and looked in his very eyes, which never flinched, but which were very cold; but she saw her own reflected in his, and took the reflection for the reality. Then she placed her arm under his head and kissed him, and a smile came to lighten her tears. At sight of these, Warner roused himself, and made a scriptural allusion about reaping joy. Well, they had a happy time, and the two began to discuss great plans. All this

happened immediately after the interview between Warner and Dr. Cumberladge. Then all mystery was cleared up. Sarah Armstrong was not dead, and was in safe keeping. He had the word of the most trusted man in Masston that the secret of his life—there was more than one, but the other was not so pressing—should be locked in the breast of honour. It was this that elated Warner, and carried him out of himself.

In reply to Dr. Cumberladge's demand, he went to his room, and wrote as follows :—

My dear Sir, — I have to express my regret that the warmth of your feelings did not admit of my explaining to you the circumstances which once connected me with her whose cause you have espoused. Nor is it now necessary. I shall best convince you of my own honesty, and freedom from any wrong-doing, by complying with your request, and all the conditions laid down by you. I accept them entirely. Had they been placed before me by any one else, I should have rejected them with scorn.

My desire is to please you, and I will pray that she who has awakened your interest may never cause you regret for the part you are playing in her case.

To prevent any needless trouble to us both, I enclose a cheque for £1000,—say one thousand pounds,—for the object of your solicitude.

So far from responding to your own wish that we may never meet again, I desire that our meeting may happen often, and not be the result of chance, but of mutual esteem. This I trust you will do your utmost to promote.—Yours very faithfully, R. W. WARNER.

To Dr. Cumberladge,
St. James's Square.

It was after the writing of this note that Warner drove to Baston Hall, and declared himself. After all, it will not be thought unnatural that Warner should have been troubled with the thoughts of Sarah Armstrong. For he was busy with the manner of his early life, his belongings, his poor relations, and all the past which he had blotted out for himself, but

which refused to be blotted out as the time drew near for him to propose to link himself with the future, and with Miss Ascham. The least he thought he could do was to tell her something of who he was, and where he came from, and who belonged to him; and it was while he was making a selection from these possessions that Sarah's image came up and refused to be ignored. It was all over now. Dr. Cumberladge, in the most unexpected manner, had stepped in and set all things straight.

CHAPTER IX.

"O place ! O form !
How often dost thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming !"
—*Measure for Measure*, ii. 4.

The Rev. William Gadso was a great promoter of heavenly schemes, and of none was he more proud than the union between the lady of Baston Hall and the master of the Oxford Works. But for him these two could never have come together; save for his ministry there was nothing that they held in common: and what they had was held in the glare of that glory, honour, and immortality that Mr. Gadso had revealed to them, and which under his guidance, and by his sanction, they had appropriated to themselves. It was Mr. Gadso who drew up the magnificent prospectus of that

company in which Edith Ascham was to invest as a *bona fide* holder of shares, and Robert Warner to become a daring speculator in the stock. No one would be more shocked than Mr. Gadso himself to hear of such a comparison as this being drawn between him and the latest development of crime and corruption in these modern days; but it is strictly true. The marriage of beauty with power—riches with grace—a lady with a man of Masston—is about to take place.

Robert Welsher Warner arose on this, the morning of his wedding-day, filled with the pride of life and the satisfaction that a superior to his fellows may justly feel when he has attained a great end. He had found, for a space at least, something of that peace of which Mr. Gadso spoke so winningly and so well, and which Mr. Gadso alone was privileged to understand. It is true that Mr. Warner's mind was too active to be at peace for long, but he was confident that when he

needed it, or cared to enjoy it, it would come at his call. The night before he gave himself up to a delightful consciousness of security, and it was in a very perfume of serenity that he fell asleep. It was with him in his first waking moments this morning. He had won a fortune, and by his own right arm—and with this had come the prize upon which he had set an almost equal value. The ways and means by which these had been achieved were pleasing to think of, and he found himself quite as much flattered by the Church and the world as by himself. The daughter of a noble race was about to be allied with him who, but a short while before, had given what had passed with him for love to no higher a person than a village maid. It was the Lord's doing. Mr. Gadso himself had so declared. There were times, however, when that consolation must have been severely shaken, for that same village maid, as we have seen, with whom he had done for ever, as most certainly she had

done with him, would yet assert a claim to a place in his thoughts—and the claim would come, as most claims do, to men who live much on the credit of their neighbours at inconvenient moments. Even now, as her image —always bright and happy—rose to his mind, he felt that some evil was impending over him. It was the herald of the knowledge presently to be forced upon him that not even to the master of the Oxford Works was it given that, by taking thought, he could banish the past wrong-doing from his life and so add one poor cubit to his moral stature. When he came down, flushed with his coming triumph, he had never felt better or looked handsomer, at least so James Reklaw thought; but James Reklaw brought him the early morning's letters, among which was one that ran as follows :—

Sir, — You were pleased to tell me that you accepted my conditions *entirely*. I would point out to you that at the outset you have departed from them. I return your cheque for

£1000, which I must ask you to replace by one for £200, to be continued yearly, according to the stipulations laid down in the copy letter sent to you.—Yours faithfully,

HUGH CUMBERLADGE.

Warner mechanically placed this letter in his pocket, and, turning round to Mr. Reklaw, said in a subdued and pleasing voice,

"Well, James, you have given the hands a holiday?"

"Oh yes, sir, they wish me to ask a favour. They would like to draw the carriage from church here."

"No, no; this is too much," said Warner, reflectively, and then added with decision, "It must not be. Miss Ascham would not like it, nor should I." No man knew better than Robert Warner that to be drawn in a carriage by men instead of by a pair of splendid horses would bring him no favour in Masston. So he went to meet his bride in the aged church close by Baston Hall, where the Rev. William

Gadso joined them with unctuous benedictions, and with an air of setting his most holy seal upon a thing of excellence in the bands of wedlock.

The lady of Baston Hall, as she stood at the altar and promised to love, honour, and obey, looked and felt like a woman to whom the privilege of making such a promise was dear. The pride and joy of her heart shone in her face and extinguished any such timid or shrinking attitude as is thought by some to become women who are giving themselves over to the man they have chosen. But, with all the gladness and devotion that showed themselves, there was a strange want of the completely human and tender quality which a lover might have wished to see. Much rather did she look like a novice entering upon her vows to some religious body in an ecstacy of enthusiasm than a bride taking the oath that was to bind her to human happiness.

Warner, on his side, assumed such dignity

and grace of aspect as he could, and that was not little. There was in his bearing something of submission to a superior power, and something, too, of self-gratulation that by that power he had been singled out to receive special and gracious gifts.

Good and kind Mr. Gadso too was happy, and happy in the sweet thankfulness he felt as he gazed on Warner's spiritualised face, where he sought and found an expression which he took to mean a befitting sense of the responsibilities coming upon him. The spiritualised face was the result of a hand touching the edges of a letter which ruthlessly spoke of "conditions."

As they left the church, daughters of the Baston tenantry threw flowers in their path; the bells of the soft gray tower sprinkled their music over the air; the men of the Oxford Works ranged themselves on either side of the road, and raised a cheer at the signal of James Reklaw; and not the less beautiful thing then

seen was the smile of Mrs. Warner, that reflected her earnest wish for their future welfare, as she thought that not even for the Duchess of Sunnyland could a better greeting been prepared.

"How happy they all look, Robert?" And who can doubt that this time Robert answered to his name, as then he heard it spoken, in a manner quite suitable to the loving tones in which it was uttered. They drove to The Hollies, one of the finest and newest of the palaces of commerce put up in Elbston, where they were to stay before taking up their quarters at the Hall.

The afternoon was spent in sweet yet active talk, wherein the happiness of the present mingled with the noble schemes of the future, until Edith, tired with the excitement and pomp of the day, fell asleep, while Warner, holding her hand in his, watched her with the same expression of devotion which came into his face when he walked into church, or into the

Oxford Works. Presently he, too, revolving many things in his rapid mind, fell not into a sleep but into a troubled doze, in which images of a gone time came before him with all the cruelty they could borrow from the mind in which they were stored. From this doze he awoke to find his beautiful wife—now restored with one short sleep—gazing at him, and he started with terror at the thought that he had just now called her "Sarah."

"What is it, my darling?" she asked in caressing tones, which showed him how false his fears were.

"Nothing, dear," he answered; "I was in that comfortless state between sleeping and waking, and I had a fancy that I had lost you."

CHAPTER X.

"The strawberry grows underneath the nettle,
And wholesome berries thrive and ripen best,
Neighboured by fruit of baser quality."

—*King Henry V.* i. 1.

"Dios hizo el hombre bueno: pero parece que Su Divina Majestad echo ases cuando creó la humanidad."—*Ricardo Palma*, "*Un Proceso contra Dios.*"

God made the good man, but it seems that His Divine Majesty threw aces when he designed to continue the race.

On went Masston: buzzing like bees, and lacquering, tinkering, hammering, filing, cutting, jointing, polishing, turning, painting, gilding, twisting, and wrapping up. It was as if a new world, to be formed of brass, had been conceived by the gods, and Masston commissioned to make it. Men and women continued to work night and day. It was thirsty work. The ceaseless toiling after money seemed to disturb great clouds of dust that settled in people's

throats, which water was not found strong enough to clear away, and the water must needs be mixed with fire to make it effectual.

It will cause no wonder if we also add to this catalogue of events the fact that thieving now became common in our busy town—not the ordinary picking and stealing known to the common law, but the extraordinary stealing of fresh air and breathing space known to laws which, though unwritten, are well enough known to some of us. To the west of Masston lay the great estate of Elbston, which, less than half a century ago, was an aggregate of damp meadows, where the grass was never cut, no cows were ever seen, and nothing of value grew except great trees, and it would have remained to this day a picturesque wilderness but for its singular luck in being within a mile and a half of Masston.

Everybody knew that some mystery hung about Elbston. Its owner never lived there, none of his relatives ever visited it, and it is

certain that the place had a sulky aspect. The rain and mist lingered longer over Elbston than anywhere else; the November fogs clung like winding-sheets to the old lanes, which straggled about like a lot of disorderly children; and there was a dog-in-the-manger appearance in the high walls and mouldy palings which separated the aristocratic acres from the peopled streets of Masston.

The town, when in its hurry-skurry of bricks and mortar, had pushed itself right under the nose of Elbston, and the shock which this act of familiarity produced to each, to both had serious consequences. The town, instead of spreading over a wide expanse of ground, like a timid hare doubled, turned its back on Elbston, and began a course of concentric circles, and Masston became a universal jumble and bewilderment of human dwellings—a mighty maze, without a plan.

But Elbston was finally laid out in wide roads; its sleepy fields became alive with

splendid villas, its straggling lanes became stately drives, palatial residences took the place of paddocks, and noble mansions occupied the hitherto vacant spaces which then lay between earth and sky. All this was done by means of Masston brass, and Masston brass it was that made the great Lord Limethorpe; and, without deviating from the truth a hair'sbreadth, it may be said that the noble owner of Elbston became eternally indebted to the great master of the Oxford Works.

The old lord never failed to say that Mr. Robert Welsher Warner had been the making of the Limethorpes. He was a pious nobleman, on whom great wealth, acquired late in life, had the soothing effect of sleep or the sudden cessation of pain on a body that had been long racked by it. Had Lord Limethorpe been a younger man at the time that Masston was up to its eyes in brick and mortar, it is just likely that the present condition of Masston had been different. But he

was not only old, he was muddle-headed, at least in everything that related to the order of human things. On the creeds, for example, he had no doubt; on the subject of work and wage, he was all doubt. If asked his opinion on making iron look like brass, or brass to look like gold, he would say that he had no opinion on the subject, and that it was unnecessary to have opinions on such matters; that if people liked these things and would pay for them, what harm was there in making and selling them, and reaping a handsome profit? But, if you asked this simple-minded old lord—he was really not so very old, except to look at—what his opinion was on justification by faith, or on works done before conversion, he would give it straight off without hesitation, just as he would give himself a glass of wine; and if any radical Dissenter who had grown rich lived in a palace of his own building in Elbston, and, therefore, now and then received an invitation to Limethorpe Hall, ventured on asking

the dear old saint what his opinion was on selling for gold that which would stand neither the touch of acid nor the smell of fire, he would look that scornful being steadfastly in the face, not answer him a word, but go and divert himself with reading a sermon by the bishop who crushed the infidel Gibbon, or the great archdeacon who invented the watch.

The faster Elbston grew the faster did Masston fill. For every house built in the western fields three little miserable cribs were stuck up in the east of Masston, till the town went on and reached the confines of the land by jamming itself against a canal; and now, bounded on the west by a stubborn old lord, who would not allow a shop to be built on his property, and on the east by a stinking ditch, every respectable person left the streets and went to live in a terrace or a crescent, a villa, or a cottage orné, and yet the town continued to fill, and that was the way the fresh air and breathing spaces were stolen, and men and

women, condemned to sweltering turmoil, became thirsty more and more.

One of the thirstiest of them all was Paul Blanchard, whose name has already appeared, and was well known to Mr. Warner. This man's toils swelled others' stores more than his own. He was of an excitable, fine-strung temperament, and had he been born to another wealth than that of ideas, or fell under the influence of another man than that of Warner, or if the accursed thirst which rose in his throat from the floating rust of Masston could have been assuaged by living water instead of being increased by stagnant poison, he might have done what Cellini did; but now none can tell what things of beauty were born and drowned in Blanchard's cups. He was a man who could mend, or improve, or beautify almost anything which the hand of a workman had formed, but he could neither mend, improve, nor beautify himself.

"I tell you that if you toast bread at a slow

fire, you will make it into cinders that will cut your gums if you try to eat it."

"Why, Paul, whose a talking of toast? Do you want any toast, Paul? Are you hungry? I've got a copper or two left if you are."

"You are a fool. What I am talking of is the slow fire you are all in here. If the fire were hotter and brighter you would be either burnt up—as some of you ought to be—or you would be splendid men, with souls that give forth light as well as fire."

"He's drunk again," said to himself the little man to whom Paul spoke.

The two men were widely apart now, however near they might once have been to each other. They were both pallid as if they had been starving. They were in reality only sadly drunk. The one was Paul Blanchard and the other an ordinary workman of the town, whose appearance denoted that he had seen better days. He was married, and Blanchard,

finding him miserable, and himself in need of doing something good, carried him to the Green Dragon to cheer him up. The result appeared to be a good deal the other way. They were in the midst of this when a gentleman, as he was called, came into the room, called for brandy and hot water in a cheerful and confident voice, which startled the two men into a helpless, squinting attitude, and then proceeded to smoke a churchwarden.

"Who are you?" demanded Blanchard, addressing the new-comer.

"My name," replied he, "is James Reklaw."

"*What* are you?" continued the poor excited fellow, shutting one eye, and tilting his mouth on one side.

"What I am is of no importance, Mr. Blanchard. We know what you are, and that there is not a man in all Masston who could do better or rise higher if you would give up drink."

"And that is true," sighed the tepid little man on the other side of Paul.

"Give up hell," responded Blanchard in an imperious and loud tone.

"Well," said Reklaw, who knew something of logic, "you may give up either one or the other, they are both the same, and you will find that I am right."

"Do you know who you are talking to, sir?"

"I know," replied the other, "that I am talking to one who might be a gentleman, and ride in his carriage"——

"Damn your carriages"——

"And be the companion of first-rate fellows, and the friend, yes, the friend of the finest lady in the land, except the Queen."

"Oh, except the Queen! And, pray, why except the Queen?" inquired the daring fellow.

"Because she refuses to allow men who drink into her presence."

"Oh, come, that's a lie, you know." Here

Blanchard indulged in a tirade against certain of the aristocracy and leading politicians of the day, which would lead one to imagine that, among other inventions of his, he had also invented those illustrious weekly newspapers whose editors are not only dreaded and courted by members of both Houses of Parliament, but are also on intimate terms with members of the Royal Family.

"Well, Mr. Blanchard," replied Reklaw with great care, "these noblemen and gentlemen whom you mention may drink, but they do not neglect their work, and very likely they never get drunk, but I do not know."

"I tell you they do get drunk, and why shouldn't they? I suppose they get infernally miserable now and then like everybody else."

"Are you miserable, Mr. Blanchard?"

"What's that to you?"

"Much."

"How much?"

"As much as you like to name."

"No, I'm not miserable, but I'll take some more brandy."

"Take some soda with it, Mr. Blanchard."

Blanchard made a sign of disgust, rose and rang a bell, which a rosy-cheeked girl answered, to whom he said, "My child, bring two tumblers of hot brandy and water."

"I'm not a child," answered the girl with a toss of her chin.

"No; what are you then?"

"I am a young lady."

"Really, that is very good; then, my young lady, bring three glasses of the liquor instead of two."

The liquor was brought, and Blanchard, taking one of the glasses, presented it to the little man, saying, "Zacchæus, take you this and climb; I mean go home, and don't beat your wife when you get there."

"She beats me," said Zacchæus, if such was his name, opening his white eyes very wide.

"I am delighted to hear it. All men who

marry below their station should be beaten daily. Pompey, trot home, and be flogged; away, mortal, and prepare thy skin for stripes, the rod is always ready for the backs of fools."

Mr. Reklaw, who knew something of Blanchard, was unprepared for this mood, and began to fear that in trying to catch him for the Oxford Works he might lose him altogether. He never heard of Blanchard as a talker, and, indeed, Paul himself had broken out in a new place.

"Sir," he went on, addressing himself to Reklaw, "you observed but just now that I might become the friend of the finest lady in the land, but not of the Queen; expound, or prepare for judgment."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blanchard, I said nothing of the kind."

"You did; why, I heard you myself now," said Zacchæus-Pompey.

"All men are liars, but all men do not know it," said Blanchard, who had now got out of

the sadness of drink into its glare. "Sir," he continued, "I know as well that you said those words as I know that I am drinking brandy diluted with water."

"What I said was, that this lady was not so fine as the Queen, but was next to the Queen."

"And I said that the whole Privy Council drank, and all the rest of 'em drank, and the Queen received these men, but me you said she would not receive, whilst I might become the friend of the finest lady in the land except the Queen."

Reklaw, to whose brain the brandy was of some use, saw in the marvellous firmness and steadiness of Blanchard's face and manner, that the only hope of conciliation lay in telling the absolute truth, recalled Blanchard's own question, and the advantage he had taken of it. "When, Mr. Blanchard, you replied to me 'Oh, except the Queen, and why pray except the Queen?' did you refer the question to yourself

or to the Duchess of Sunnyland, I mean the lady whom I intended?"

"I referred, as you referred, of course, to myself."

"I assure you I did not refer to you; I only meant that the Queen was, of course, above the Duchess."

Blanchard was satisfied, and his curiosity aroused. "Is the Duchess very beautiful?" he inquired, looking into the ether where all beauty dwells.

"She is so beautiful, Mr. Blanchard, that you would, the moment you saw her, wish that you had all the fine fruits of the world, and all its flowers to give to her."

It must not be forgotten that Mr. Reklaw had some claim to be considered a literary gentleman. "Then those are my terms. You can have me at the Oxford Works—that was what you came here for, you know—you can have me at the Oxford Works for the chance of knowing the Duchess of Sunnyland, who is so

beautiful that the moment I see her I shall wish for the finest fruits of the world and all its flowers to give her—my God!"

Blanchard became perfectly sober—the spirit of the liquor he had drunk went out like a flash as it came in contact with the divine fire of his nature. He rose and said, taking the little man with the big wife on his shoulder, "I will carry this poor fellow home, and to-morrow expect me at the Oxford Works."

And in this way it was that Paul Blanchard was won by James Reklaw for Mr. Robert Welsher Warner.

CHAPTER XI.

"It is merely through the quite bestial ignorance of the Moral Law, in which the English bishops have contentedly allowed their flocks to be brought up, that any of the modern conditions of trade are possible."
—*An Oxford Professor who Strives and Cries in the Street.*

"What relief from human wit expect?
That shows us sick, and sadly are we sure
Still to be sick till Heaven reveal the cure."
—DRYDEN, *Religio Laici.*

THE current of human life in Masston was smooth on the surface, but if a man had time or strength to stand still, and let the current sweep by him, he soon found that though smooth to swim with, it was very difficult to oppose, and when opposed, it became, like the resisted sea of peace, furious and angry. Benjamin Jeavons now had to stand alone in breasting the corruption and injustice, the violence and imposture, in which everything seemed to float and be borne in his native town. His old

warrior father before he died made Benjamin swear that he would steadfastly refuse to be made into a human brick, or a machine, or to make a dozen inferior things instead of six good ones, or to lower his prices, or alter his patterns; to go into a manufactory, and become a mechanical slave, or to leave the home in which he was born, and where his father and mother lived and died. But being only a workman, he was swept by the steady and strong current of things away from his bench; his tools were wrested from his hands; his craft disappeared in the rising tide; or, to drop all metaphor, and come to facts and reason, Benjamin Jeavons was a skilled workman out of work, whom no Masston master required or would hire. But few things were left for this worker to choose from in the condition in which he found himself. He might steal from, or sponge on, his friends and neighbours; he might go for a soldier, or set up a public-house; buy beer on wholesale credit, and sell it for cash with the help

of some intelligence, and the chance of doubling his capital every six months. But not one of these courses entered Benjamin Jeavon's mind. He was, however, convinced of one palpable fact, which stared him in the face, namely, that the saying, "So long as thou doest well to thyself, men will speak well of thee," was the saying for which most men most cared. To him, however, such doing was not possible. He was standing idle in the market-place because other men had entered into his labour and degraded it. He felt his strength going out of him. The little money he had saved against a rainy day was melting, and as each day went by him in which no work was done—and only so much taken from the store—his soul began to sicken, and like other sick men, cut off from all human sympathy and the enthusiasm which springs from working in a common cause, he grew bitter, and his thoughts, from being sad, became fierce.

"This is not bread!" he exclaimed to him-

self one morning as he sat alone over his breakfast, "nor is this butter; this tea is like only so much dish-water; this may be sugar, I don't know." He wished to know. A strong feeling possessed him, as it often did when an idea came and knocked at his door begging protection or demanding execution. Jeavons knew that knock, opened his heart, and man though he was, felt as grateful and tender, yet proud, as a young girl receiving her lover. The idea was an angel in disguise.

Jeavons, with a soul which shone in his face, went straight to Doctor Cumberladge.

"Doctor, is this bread?"

"That is not the bread your mother used to bake, Benjamin; that was made for nourishment, this is made to sell; it is a vile compound of flour, alum, potatoes, and human brains."

"Is this sugar?"

"No."

"What is it, Doctor?"

"It is a small amount of sugar, and a large amount of another article which is worth less than a farthing a ton."

"Is this tea, sir?"

"That is not tea, but the worthless leaves of a shrub which does not grow in China or Japan, but in our own English lanes."

"And can you tell me if this is butter?"

"I can tell you at once, that no cow has made the smallest contribution to this yellow substance, sold to you for sixteenpence a pound, and which can be made for less than sixpence."

"This is a shameful business, sir,"

To the amazement of Benjamin Jeavons, who was in a state of intense excitement, amounting to mental exaltation, Doctor Cumberladge broke into a hearty laugh.

"I say," said the other in a defiant tone, "this is a shameful business."

"I am delighted to hear you say so," answered the hilarious Doctor, who now

and then indulged in a little impulsive gaiety; "delighted to see you look so thunderstruck, ah! ah! ah! You have made a discovery. You draw an inference, up springs a resolution, and out of it new life." And again Doctor Hugh Cumberladge began laughing at Jeavons as if he were laughing for him.

Jeavons now thought that he caught the Doctor's meaning, and asked for an explanation, which was speedily given.

"My dear Benjamin,"—the doctor still regarded the workman as of old, and as when he first knew him many years ago, albeit they had never dropped each other's acquaintance,—"My dear Benjamin, I am delighted that you have made this discovery. It is nothing new to me. I have long known what you appear to have found out only this morning. Listen to me. You have struck the path which leads to fortune, fame, and power. You can't very well hope to be a bishop, except by accident, or a judge; these offices yet require great

learning and knowledge to fill them, but you can become a lord, a companion of princes, a patron of artists and of art, and the admired of the most beautiful women in the world, and those are only to be found in London. You can have a park and any amount of deer. You can live like the Pope, or the Sultan, or both. —a Sultan one week, the Pope another. You can have a private chaplain, and own a daily newspaper, and so give a fashion to the church and an opinion to the world. You can build a house, the walls of which shall be of the choicest glass silvered at the back; in brief, Benjamin, you can become a great man. Ah! ah! ah! ah!"

Then he stopped short, and while the mirth was gurgling in his throat, he exclaimed in a tone which made his previous laughter terrible, "There is not a house or garden, church or chapel, carriage or stable, or cellar of wine, or aught of luxury or show in the whole of yonder new Elbston, that has not been brought

there by fraud or purchased with dishonour. Every charming picture which hangs on those walls was bought either by profits from poison sold as wine, or bestial filth which was sold as bread and butter. Oh," he said, with a sigh expressive of shame, disgust, and despair, "I could weep like a child, and all because there is no one to take away these spoils, and restore them to those from whom they have been robbed."

"The poor most," remarked Benjamin.

"No, not the poor most," said the Doctor, quieting down into a very serious tone; "the trees of the field suffer as much from drought as does the grass. The sufferings of the poor are great, so are their wrongs; but men of my class suffer more, and are more wronged by this universal wrong-doing; and the greatest wrong of all is our being wronged of the poor."

"I am afraid, Doctor," said modest, true-hearted Benjamin, "that you are talking to yourself more than to me, for I can hardly under-

stand you; but is this state of things to go on? will there be no change for the better? is every man among us to become a kneaded clod?"

"It was a saying of one of my ancestors—let us sit down, Jeavons, and quiet ourselves with a little temperate thought and chat. I am very glad to see you—it was a saying of Sir Hugh Cumberladge that there were some things that could not be changed by conflict with them, such as a fog or mist. Out of this you can only deliver yourself by rising higher, and not by struggling with it. Now we are in a fog in Masston"——

"You mean smoke, sir."

"Very well, call it smoke; formerly it was agricultural mist, now it is manufacturing smoke, both are equally good for poisoning and blinding, both come equally from neglect, ignorance, wastefulness, selfishness, and the filthy and devouring thirst for money, and the thing you have to do is to get out of it, and not try to clear it away by fighting with it."

Jeavons, who had come for knowledge, and not for a sermon, was too much in earnest to sit quietly under the Doctor's metaphors, and he said, "I think you can speak plainer to me, sir, and I should like to understand all this as well as you."

"Bravo, Benjamin! To get a clear understanding is the whole duty of man. Let us then explain. In Masston the vast multitude of its men and women are compelled to see everything alike. The brave have no use for their courage, the pure nothing to see or touch but what is filthy; and when the brave and the pure are reduced to the level of the craven and the foul, they may be said to be in a fog, or mist, or smoke that is very dense, and the sooner they get out of it the better."

"Do you mean, go and live in Elbston?"

"That is the new remedy, but it brings no cure, for the simple reason that the fog and smoke are as thick there as they are here."

"God help us!"

"Benjamin, a man needs but two gifts by which to live free of blindness and filthiness, but they are gifts of the gods, and only given to their favourites."

"Favourites, sir?"

"Oh yes, the immortals have their favourites as well as we. Indeed, the mortal tendency of preferring to serve a young and pretty lass in preference to an old and withered woman is quite Olympic in its origin. You would rather run to pick up the glove of a beautiful girl than go out of your way to raise a poor old woman who had been knocked down in the dirt by a butcher's cart."

"I would do nothing of the sort."

"Well, well, keep your seat. I am not a fighting man, Benjamin; besides, you are twice my weight and three inches taller. The two gifts the gods provide for man that he may live, I say,—as my ancestors and all great men who have ever lived have said,—are courage and a clean heart."

Jeavons, who had kept close watch of the Doctor's face as he went on delivering his oracles in prose, here interposed the practical question, "Has this anything to do with the selling of sand for sugar and sloe-leaves for tea?"

"Everything," replied the Doctor, raising his eyebrows as if they would touch the ceiling, in utter astonishment that a man so honest as the one before him did not possess the divine art of knowing the unexpressed thoughts and meanings of others. "Observe," he continued, "here, in this foul town, the tongue has lost its discernment, the human perception of taste is dying out, for the simple reason that everything to eat is covered with soot, and the stuff which is drunk to wash it down is filled with soot; such soot as enters into a man's soul, which clogs his brain, pollutes his blood, and turns him into a creeping coward."

"Oh!" exclaimed the listener in a deep sigh, which, however, had in it a dash of impatience.

"Yes," rapidly added the speaker, as if in

explanation, "I suppose you know that here in Masston there are one hundred thousand men and women who drink more gin and beer than is good for them—are drunkards, in short?"

Benjamin Jeavons made a profound bow.

"Well, this universal disease comes from universal uncleanness. The sure and certain way to produce a drunkard is to keep him permanently dirty; he then becomes the slave of slaves, the tool of thieves, the victim of disease, the forsaken of God."

"I wish you had been a parson, sir."

"Well, Benjamin of the uplifted arm and spotless apron, I am as you know a descendant of knights, and it was the duty of knights to know something of everything—doctoring, farming, law-making, love-making, governing, fighting, and preaching,—and he that mastered most of all these was the best knight. Since the dawn of politics, and the division of labour, I am reduced to the lowest rank of knighthood. I am a mere scavenger of

men's dirty bodies, and because the power to better their own condition has been taken from men, doctoring has become a great profession. I therefore preach because it is in the Cumberladge blood, and am reduced to doctoring by the degradation of mankind, and the prevalence of soot."

"What good," cried Jeavons in a very sad voice, "are the gifts of courage and a clean heart to them who are condemned to live in an atmosphere of cowardice and filth?"

"Benjamin, you delight a man who is weary by the clearness of your sight. Courage and a clean heart are of no use to anybody, if like armour, they are not put on, worn and used, in the battle where they are needed. The filthiness of Masston, by which I mean its degrading worship of money, has robbed all its strong men of their purity, and turned their valour into the courage of the beast which conquers only for itself, and

turns all others into mere things of prey. The rich pin-makers, pen-makers, brassfounders, lacquerers, spurious jewellery and silver-plate people, who herd in the splendid filthiness of Elbston, are the courageous beasts of Masston; and the hundred thousand toilers, who moil for gin and beer, and nothing—nothing—else, are their prey. They were first made unclean, and then too easily frightened out of their souls."

"Could not a man in Masston sell bread, butter, tea, and wholesome beer without becoming a wild beast?"

"No, unless he is content to take only wages for his work, and live a workman all his days. If you can find a man who is willing to do that, I will join him myself in the business, and become a purveyor of human food that is fit for human beings."

"We could buy up all the milk of Baston and Russet, and Ashon and Bole—make our own butter and cheese, and begin in that way."

"We!" exclaimed the Doctor in surprise.

"I came here this morning to consult you on that, and ask advice. I never dreamt that there was so much to be done, and I have been idle many weeks now."

"I have the best butter-maker in the world," said the Doctor, having no definite plan on the subject in his own mind, although he was at that moment thinking of none other than Sarah Armstrong.

So the idea which came to Benjamin Jeavons on the morning of this long chat with Dr. Cumberladge, and came like an angel unawares, took the shape and form of a provision shop. But then he was to have for his partner a descendant of knights, and perhaps the help and guidance of the best butter-maker in the world!

"I thought I knew all the butter-makers round here," said Jeavons in a ruminating tone.

"Her name is Sarah Armstrong," answered the Doctor; "one of my best friends."

CHAPTER XII.

"How unlucky are the rich in this life, and after death they cannot even go to heaven. 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.' This terrible anathema reveals the bitter hatred of the divine communist for the Stock Exchange and the *haute finance* of Jerusalem. The world is full of philanthropists; there are societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and much is being done for the poor. But for the rich, who are far more unhappy, nothing is done. Instead of propounding prize questions on silk culture, stall feeding, and Kant's philosophy, our learned societies should offer a large reward for the solution of the momentous question, 'How can a camel be drawn through the eye of a needle?' Until the great camel question is solved, and the rich are thus accorded a hope of entering the kingdom of heaven, nothing effectual will have been accomplished for the good of the poor. If the rich were not restricted to mundane pleasures, they would not be so hard-hearted, nor so envious of the poor, who are to fare so well on high. Naturally enough they ask, 'Why should we do anything for this trash, which will one day fare much better than we, and which we shall never meet after death?' If the rich felt assured that they would have to meet us hereafter, and live with us through all eternity, they would be careful not to abuse us too much while on earth. Let us, therefore, above all things, solve the great camel question."

—*Heinrich Heine.*

THE camel question was never shirked in Masston, whilst not a few of the very rich had

solved it, at least for themselves. They built houses for the sick, houses for the rest of the old and the instruction of the young of the poor. They built fountains with texts cut in them, and there were soup-kitchens in winter and excursions into the country in summer—all paid for by rich men who never were known to refuse an application for money when made in the name of charity. Nay, there was a generous rivalry among them in this, and bankers and brewers, button-makers and great silversmiths, entered into annual competition with railway gods, and the gods of coal, cotton, and brass, which should do most for the needy, the blind, the halt, and the permanent sick of the town. They even had lists printed of names and sums, which were freely circulated.

The worst of it all was, that the poor never did or could do anything for the rich, could never give thanks even for what was given to them. The poor of Masston, who excited the sympathy of Mrs. Warner and

the prayers of Mr. Gadso, puzzled everybody, and were a puzzle to themselves. These were the men and women who, for the most part, formed the irregular army of workers in brass and iron : people who, when trade was brisk, and the Oxford Works full of hands and great in labour, made harvest for the vendors of beer, and increased greatly the labours of the men in blue. When trade was dull, these very same people still gave trouble, and the guardians of the poor had more to do than they could manage, and the rural police less time for early sleeping.

Every year, now for many years past, did this shifting, thriftless mass of human beings go on increasing in Masston. They could not save money, nor could they save themselves. And these two inabilities or deficiencies sprang from like causes—there was no bank where they could deposit their gains either of coin or of wisdom. For let it be noted that a man can no more take care of

himself, alone, of the growth of his mind and soul, than he can of his increasing moneys. True he can wrap them in a napkin, or dig a hole and place them there, but this method has been pronounced unprofitable and reprehensible. There was some deep truth in the answer given by a sturdy and thinking workman to one of those whom soot and beer were choking.

"How *is* a feller to lay up treasure in heaven?" asked this grimy one.

"By remaining my friend," answered the other, and with the answer left him.

The victim of soot and strong waters did not follow or in any way attempt to recover him. So his bank by his own laches failed, and his treasure was squandered.

Mr. Gadso and the members of the clerical meeting declared that the public-houses and the liquor traffic were the fatal causes of the gross immorality, idleness, and general sinfulness of Masston.

Benjamin Jeavons maintained, on the contrary, that beer and beer-houses had as much to do with the sinfulness of Masston as the waters of the sea had to do with the devil-possessed swine who rushed headlong into it down the steep place and were choked. But that saying was too deep even for Mr. Gadso, whose refusal to notice it was supposed to spring from its irreverence.

Some said one thing, some another, and dear old Lord Limethorpe startled the town by announcing it as his opinion that all beer-sellers should be heavily taxed, and a Bill brought into Parliament to shorten the hours when they should be allowed to sell their poison to the public. Lord Limethorpe had become a great authority in Masston ever since. At a public meeting in the Town Hall, he told of the astounding discovery made by himself, unassisted by any human being, that while the taverns were allowed to open their doors on the Lord's-day for the sale of soul-destroying

beverages ten or twelve hours, the churches' doors were open for six hours only.

A shudder ran through the villas of Elbston when this saying of the noble lord became known. The gentry of that delightful suburb then bestirred themselves, and an effort was made to see if the claims of God and the arch-enemy of man could not at any rate be equalised, or some compromise effected. The suburb, we may say, continued its growth in all that could charm the hearts of men made of money. The dark corners of Masston were not without their attraction, and if the distance between them became greater and colder every day, it must have been on account of the faults on both sides. Still, while the "Hollies" and the "Hawthorns," decked with the glories of the flowering earth, seemed to grow more glorious every day, the Cock-pit and the Pudding Bag grew more dismal—more shocking, reckless, hopeless, and aggravating.

The Pudding Bag of Masston was noted for

its hospitality. It cultivated the drama, literature, and the fine arts. It could boast of orators and philosophers, warriors and poets; nor did it lack the elements of beauty, and the charms of woman.

Into this Pudding Bag let us now enter in this warm, sunny afternoon. A generous sun has penetrated every dwelling, and brought out all the occupiers of the court, as well as an old black-currant tree, crucified against the western wall. Children, decked as if in honour of old memories, might be seen investigating the treasures cast away by their elders. The fountain in the centre of the court, which, by the art of man, was made to yield downward the stream he needs, and when he needs it, was surrounded by a group of youths of both sexes, evidently communicating with each other by their eyes, for their tongues were mute. Reclining under the windows, or across the door-ways of the dwellings, men and women were seeking grateful, if not elegant ease, and

they too were as silent as they were still. Only one person, an artist in glass, differed from the rest : repose to him, who had been for a whole week before devoted to contemplation, brought no pleasure ; so he took up his seat, not negligently, on the top of a high-backed chair, turning a porcelain plate on the great toe of his left foot, which excited the attention of all, the wonder of some, and the playful displeasure of his spouse. A number of the men were smoking the dear leaf of the tropics, and dreaming of things they may never see or handle.

In the midst of this there came into the court, at a rapid, uneven walk, a boy of stunted growth, but with broad shoulders and a thoughtful face. He was attended by half-a-dozen other boys of his own age, mere children to look at, but with deep lines on their faces and great pride in their breasts. They might have been abroad in search of some vast treasure which they had found, and were returning to bring the glad tidings to their friends; or

their leader, having fought a giant and slain him, they were carrying their warrior home to be crowned.

They had simply been to church, where Tom Tappit, the blacksmith's son, had taken down the sermon in shorthand, and the other fellows had been looking on. He said he would do it, at which some mocked, but done it he had, and there the sermon was, in Tom's book, provided for him by Mr. Jeavons.

"Here's a lark!" cried an artist in brass. "My eye!" said another; and Tom, looking as if he had been about some desperate deed, made straight to his father, who being a blacksmith by profession, and an amateur gladiator, was a good refuge for the small magician to fly to.

"I call that real fun," remarked an animated little man; "I'm blest if it ain't as good as bird's-nesting; goin' and gettin' the parson's sermon and bringin' it home." There was a general laugh.

"Get a chair for Tom. Come, lad, and let us hear what the parson has been about."

A chair was accordingly brought, and great interest taken in the stolen sermon. Everybody was now standing up, and except the blacksmith, there was not another body that stood higher than five feet three or four, the women being very poor and short, looking as if they were the mere ashes of humanity.

Tom, with much difficulty, and as if groping his way in the dark, began reading in a timid voice, and saying, "The text is—

"'Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall, and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick.'"

"Them words ain't in the Bible!" exclaimed one daring intruder on the silence which had set in.

"Yes, they is," said one of Tom's six equerries, "they are in the Book of Kings."

"The Book of Kings," echoed the proud mother of that boy.

"Does anybody else want to make any more remarks?" inquired the blacksmith, withdrawing his long pipe from his lips and looking at the glass-cutter who had first spoken.

Tom went on, his eyes buried in his brows.

"These words, my beloved brethren, were addressed by the great woman of Shunem to her husband, on behalf of the prophet of the Lord, 'Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall.' Charity, my Christian friends, towards the servants and ministers of God is the distinguishing mark of His children. Without it"——

"Pass that, Tom, and come to something we don't know," said the blacksmith, who noticed that the women were becoming very attentive.

"It has been a question among learned"——

"Ah, now, come—here's something stunning."

"Whose a torking now?" inquired the glass-cutter bitterly.

"You shut up," answered the blacksmith; "he's my son, not yours."

"He's more mine than yourn," said his mother with animation.

These interruptions enabled the young stenographer to decipher his hieroglyphics, and he continued—

"It has been a question among the learned—the men who, gifted with patience and untiring zeal for their Master's cause, give themselves up night and day to discover what is the meaning of things that are dark and hard to understand, men unmindful of the world's riches, unheeding its prizes, careless of its glitter, and not regarding the power and distinction which it can confer.

"It has been, I say again, dear friends, a question among the learned, whether the room mentioned in the text was an upper or a lower room. But it will be a comfort to God's children to know that it *was* a room."

"Ah, ah, ah!" "Oh, oh!" "My eyes and

limbs!" "Well, I am blowed!" were exclamations suddenly shot out from all quarters of the little crowd. Even the blacksmith could not refrain from laughing, but the women declared it was a beautiful sermon, and wished they had heard it, and "it was a shame to interrupt the lad like that and he doing so well."

These words were from the glass-cutter's wife, who had ventured on the confession that if her gown had been out of pawn she would have been at church to hear it for herself.

"Oh, you would! Well now, what a pity that uncle of yours shuts up a Sundays," sneered her husband, "you might go to the evening service. It has been,"—continued the satirical cutter of glass, imitating the tones of the afternoon lecturer at the Old Church,—"it has been a question among the learned, whether the man with three gold balls first took in a man's best coat, or a woman's Sunday gown, but it is a comfort to some of God's people to know that he did take in either one or the other. You'd

like to have been at church would you?" he continued, addressing his wife in tones of great cruelty. "Well, my dear, go; you have my free consent; you'll make a good question for the learned, I should think," and the glass-cutter proceeded to make mention of the preacher's eyes, and then of the preacher's nose, and declared, amid a flourish of laughter, that the church was "nothin' else but a damned big nose, wot turned up at folks who stopped away from it on purpose, or because their uncle was out of town, and a nose as smelt into folks' bizness, and a nose as went on sniftin' and snortin' all the blessed time you was there, and when you come out you feel just as if you had been a smellin' bad tripe."

There was a laugh at this burst of eloquence, of course, but the sentiments of the glass-cutter were either not understood or lightly regarded.

Truth to tell, the Pudding Bag on that day was dull. Perhaps it was the influence of the sermon, or the weather, for people not accus-

tomed to the sun hardly know what to do with it when it visits them in its fiery glory. The blacksmith and the Tappit family generally were the dullest of them all. Not a soul could raise even a whistle; and the children, not being able to dance without music, stood about like odd bits of furniture out of place. The smith, unable, or unwilling, to endure the tideless monotony longer, rose up, went into his house and brought thence an immense white jug, capable of holding two or more gallons of beer. With this magnificent vessel in one hand, the other hand being engaged in supporting in his lips a yard of clay, he stalked down the court amid universal stillness, and presently returned, but this time both hands were occupied; the great stone jug monopolising the service of both, the pipe lying quietly across the rim, like a sword on a drum.

"Let's cheer up," said the blacksmith, as a sort of grace before drink. Everybody drank, old and young, the young as much as the old,

and as if they had been born to it, and in an incredibly short time the great white stone jug became full of nothing but air. It was soon filled again, and again. Then came more pipes, and every one's tongue was straightway untied. Some sang; old songs, and quite forgotten now in Masston, such as "The Sweep," "The Robin," "The Sigh," and "The Brimming Can." What a treat it was to many to hear the glass-cutter spout "My Name is Norval," for he had a good voice when he was in a good temper.

"O mother, mother!" cried a girl in a shrieking voice, as she suddenly entered the yard, ran into Mrs. Tappit's arms, and began crying.

"You naughty, naughty wench," said the mother, putting her right hand on the girl's head, and pressing it to her breast, "where have you bin?"

This was, in fact, the explanation of the dulness which reigned in the court before the

advent of the great white jug. 'Lizzebeth Tappit had been out all night, and no one knew where. Every one suspected, and every one was silent, for Tappit could have swallowed every one of them on the least provocation.

In a mild voice he said to his daughter, "Well, 'Lizzebeth, *have* you come back?"

"O feyther," was the answer, "I'll never do so no more. I shall never be a bad gal again."

She was a fair girl, her hair tied up behind in a knot as if it were a rag: thin she was, and haggard; had you seen her for the first time you would say this creature had been beaten, or she had been starved, or she had been drunk. No one asked her where she had been. Even her brother said nothing, but he did look at her a good deal, so did they all. At last her father poured some of the nectar from the great white jug into a cup, and this she drank with the deliberation and content of a man.

"I shall never be a bad gal again, mother."

"Hast got religion, lass?"

"Oh, somethin' better nor that!" she said with great animation, her blue eyes giving a delightful colour to her bony face, which softened it into a human expression.

"They took me to the play; Jane Ruckles and her mother, and then they took me home as it was so late. O Tom! if you see that play it will make a man of you. There was a king and he had three daughters. But Lor', father, such a king! I never know'd what a king was before, he was so beautiful, and his voice went through you as if it were wine and music. That was at first, but after"——

"What was the play?" inquired the shorthand writer.

"Well, Tom, you know, there was three daughters, and the king asked them which of you loves me the best, and the eldest said she did, she loved him better than her own eyes, and beyond anythink, which was all my

eye, you know; and the other said the same, and then I know'd they were liars. I found that out myself. But the king believed them."

"If you found it out, why couldn't the king find it out as well?" inquired one of the company.

"You just wait," continued 'Lizzebeth; "then the other sister—you could tell at once she wosn't a liar—said as how she loved him as was her bond! neither more nor less. This was in the palace."

"A real palace?" inquired one of the smaller listeners.

"Oh yes, beautiful, everything—but you only looked at the king, he made the palace, you know; there was lords and ladies, a reg'lar lot, and they all listening to the three sisters; and the youngest said that she loved him, but when she got married she would love her husband."

"Well, that's quite right."

"On course it were," continued the excited girl; "but you should a seen how orful mad it

made the king. Then he gives everything to the two bad uns, and takes off his crown and tells their husbands to halve that between them, and wouldn't give a rap to the little un. Then there was a soldier chap, he was an earl, told the king that he was making a fool of himself, and took the part of the little un. And the king, in a voice that thundered through everybody, then and there banished the soldier out of England, and off he went, as you think, but he changes his clo's, and he does not reg'lar go, but keeps up a spy on the two bad uns, and stays by the king, just for all as if he smells a rat."

"Well, well, get on."

"I am a gettin' on—I'll tell it all after, but now I want only to tell about these awful hussies and the little good un. How those two wretches did maul the king, and how he did storm. They took away his horses and his men, and they say the most orful things to him, and he fires up as how to make your very blood

run cold. It's the grandest sight in all the world to see him."

The great actor had touched even the common clay of this ill-kempt girl and changed it into gold. She had seen a king—that tragic Lear, whom none that saw ever forgot. But she had seen likewise her own nature in a new glass that showed it not darkly. She had seen the awful villany of the world, and been face to face with all that is noble as well as all that is wretched and base. So clear was it all to her that she made it clear to them, who, though they had not seen it, yet believed.

The yard was in a ferment, everybody's soul was enjoying itself; in short, they were all happy. Here, two men sauntered into the court who were evidently well known, and what happened shall be related in another chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

"O what a precious comfort 'tis to have so many like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes."

—*Timon of Athens.*

Mr. Robert Welsher Warner was, as we now know, as well aware as the Jews of old of the importance of forms and ceremonies. There was, in truth, as Mr. Gadso once said of one of the Epistles, "much of the Jew element" in Warner. It would have been a pardonable mistake for a young man of the period to have taken Warner for a converted Jew. For one thing he had not lived among men without learning the value of burnt-offerings, and his was a nature capable of believing that what had once been acceptable to gods, although now despised and rejected by them, might be made attractive to men, and a means of secur-

ing their favour. Warner was so full of motives that, without being charged with malice, his most intimate friends might, in playful earnestness, have said this of him.

A beneficent and wise host is, for the time that he sits surrounded by his guests, a king among men. Sit where he will, that seat is the head of the table. This was recognised by the noble Romans, who, with the radicalism that underlies imperial convictions, were careful to elect some other than the master of the house as master of the feast. And this remarkable modern man of ours, who could steal a market and allure a duchess, knew, by some method mysterious to us but none the less real, how to combine something of the classical empire of a feast, with a touch of submission that was grateful to those of his guests who had spiritual authority over him. Such guests had been frequent at Warner's table in the days when it had no mistress.

Now, shortly after his marriage, it was his

purpose and his wife's, to mark their sense of the respect and gratitude which they owed that holy man Mr. Gadso, by a dinner-party to be given especially in his honour. Mrs. Warner could only honour Mr. Gadso by widening his sphere of usefulness, and bringing beneath his influence men whom, but for her and her husband, the eloquent and beloved clergyman would never have seen much less come in contact with. And it was understood that there was some special significance in this their first dinner-party which Warner gave after his marriage, and to which were bidden, in the first place, Mr. Gadso and his Dandelion, as Julia Ascham, with her inborn tendency to soft and tender satire, would persist in calling Mrs. Gadso. Afterwards came some persons of commercial value over whom Mr. Gadso was to cast his wand; and, after the manner of Masston, at least make brass look like silver, and give to copper the trick of seeming gold. Then followed some less

clerical lights, among whom was the Reverend Edward Sweetapple, who had sat at the feet of Mr. Gadso, and from him had imbibed much grace. He had not the fiery eloquence or the comprehensive wisdom of the master, but he had certain special gifts, such as a low-toned voice of singular and penetrating sweetness, an eye which could rather entreat than command, and a general aspect of sympathy, which to some was most attractive.

One maiden lady, of great wealth, was heard to say, that in Mr. Gadso's presence she felt as if that great and good man already knew her secret thoughts, her doubts, and wishes, and it was her custom to wait for him to speak of them. But when she was with Mr. Sweetapple, she seemed to be with one who was anxious she should disclose her heart in order that he should relieve, if that might be, its troubles.

This discrimination of one who knew and

loved both may, to some extent, indicate the difference between the master and the disciple.

The feast was expected with equal pleasure, though for somewhat different reasons, by Robert Warner and Edith. Julia, her one sister, alone thought it would be as serious as a religious ceremony, and said so, but in words more frank and homely.

"Julie, darling," said her sister to her in answer to some light and jesting comment as they busied themselves with the flowers for the table, "I wish you could look upon these matters as I do."

"Look upon a dinner-party as a solemn affair? Is that what you mean, Edith? If it is, it seems to me you are wrong from every point of view. Would you have no gaiety in the world? Would you have nothing in common with nature's changing moods? Would you conduct all things with the same staid gravity? Would you," she continued, holding up both hands, from which

fell floretted light, "would you never laugh with the summer flowers, nor weep with the autumn leaves as they fall tear upon tear to the ground?"

"You know, Julie, I wish for nothing of the kind, and you cannot accuse me of never varying from what you call staid gravity. I can laugh, and do laugh as well as you, but"——

"Yes, that is one of your odious *buts*. *But* you do not lose sight of the chief end. *But* you never forget the one thing needful, whether we eat or drink, we must do all—all—you know the rest." But seeing a tender look of loving appeal in her sister's eyes, she added in her own natural tone of voice—the voice of the Aschams when Baston Hall was merry with music, song, and dance, "I like to laugh out of pure lightheartedness, and if I were to be thinking always of the same thing I should grow as dull and stupid as"——

"As what?" said Mr. Warner, who at

that moment entered the room on his return from the Oxford Works. "But it is needless to seek for comparisons. No one can imagine Julia being either dull or stupid." This was said with a bow of solemn courtesy, to which Julia's only answer was the music of a laugh.

"The honour of taking you into dinner to-night, Julia," continued Warner, consulting a folded paper, "is assigned to Mr. Sweetapple."

Julia, for every use of her Christian name, and for this last piece of news, put on a look which ill became her, and said, recovering herself, "Such honour is too great for me, I am not fit for the Church. I shall be saying 'amen' instead of 'yes,' or some other very wicked and perhaps abominable thing, which I shall be as much vexed with as either of you."

"Julia," said Edith, "I think I would like you to wear my diamonds to-night. Will you?"

"Oh, if I could wear them in my eyes, make them sparkle and glitter in my hair,

like rain-drops in the grass, would not Mr. Sweetapple turn himself into a missionary on the spot, and set about my conversion?" And the heathen beauty, with another sweet laugh, went away to dress for dinner, and even Robert Warner felt amused, a thing of more astonishment to himself than to us, who know that not even to such self-made men as he is laughter absolutely proscribed.

The dinner was attended with that success which so belonged to Warner that it seemed to be part and parcel of his nature. He could clothe himself with success as with a garment. The great ones of the earthly and the spiritual world of Masston met and joined hands together on Warner's rug even as spiritual and earthly greatness were combined in Warner himself.

In those days, and especially in Masston, where trade custom made it a thing of necessity and church-going a habit, punctuality was everywhere rampant; so that between the

arrival of the guests and the announcement of dinner there was not more than time enough for some kind of fusion to take place between the different elements gathered together. When dinner had been announced, and those for whom the table was spread were collected around it, Mr. Gadso delivered a grace before meat across the glittering white and silver of the table, which was perhaps more ornate than the grace before drink delivered by Tappit, the blacksmith, across the great white jug. But its meaning was much the same. The difference was this, that Tappit adjured his fellows and himself to cheerfulness in the belief that they could with some effort procure cheerfulness for themselves, while Mr. Gadso seemed to insist upon some heavenly aid being given him towards cheerfulness, or perhaps he thought that it would be indecorous in him to be cheerful without the consent of the heavenly powers. In whatever manner, cheerfulness did come.

There was much rejoicing at the end of the table, where Mr. Gadso and Mrs. Warner sat, over the happy future in store for Masston, and the happy present which was now being celebrated: "And," said Mrs. Warner with a smile of confident joy, "I can never forget, nor I am sure can my husband, that it is you whom we have to thank for this."

Mr. Gadso protested that he was but an instrument, that no thanks should be given to him for any good that he might have been the means of carrying out, and more skimble-skamble stuff, which to the englamoured Edith was utterance soft and strong as the divinest voice ever bestowed on man.

Meanwhile the Dandelion, looking as yellow as her gold, was listening with deepest attention to Warner's picturesque account of his first interview with the beautiful Edith Ascham at the Oxford Works; and when he had ended his tale, Mrs. Gadso cast a devout look to the other end of the table, and said, "And to think

that, in a manner, as one might say, it was Mr. Gadso's doing!" Whereon Robert Warner bowed his head and smiled gratefully.

Mrs. Gadso was a lady not without sense, but so smothered was it in grace, or the means of grace, that she lost the use of it. Her sense was like her money, consecrated to God and Mr. Gadso. She could build a church, but for the life of her she could not hang a door to a cottage or cure a smoking chimney. She knew the Psalms of David by heart, and enjoyed them; but a single line out of Shakespeare acted on her brain like a box on the ears. Poor thing, it was not her fault that she inherited many thousands of ill-gotten gains!

Mr. Sweetapple, who had often looked at Julia Ascham's face and noticed her engaging ways, said to her, almost as soon as grace was finished, in an interrogative tone, "I am sure, Miss Julia, you must think it was a happy day when Mr. Gadso and your sister met—do you not?"

It was Mr. Sweetapple's particular province to follow up a half statement of this kind, with a question put in a tone which implied a not unpleasant sympathy between himself and the person addressed, and his listeners had been known to entirely change their minds on important subjects, merely for the pleasure of bidding for this sympathy. To such considerations, however, Julia Ascham was blind, and to Mr. Sweetapple's engaging speech she merely answered—

"Since my sister's marriage, Mr. Sweetapple, I have been Miss Ascham."

This was not petulance, but that quality of godlike cruelty, except for which the very air we breathe would become a deadly poison to all new-born things, and the old deprived of the care of the young would grow in nothing but malignity. Julia refused to have her tongue anointed, or her heart washed. She once told her sister, "If I should become very religious, I will sell all that I have, and give it

to the poor. I have thought much about turning chimney-sweeper, I am thinking of it now, and am quite sure, if I am not allowed to laugh and dance and sing in my own house, I will go and live amongst those who have nothing else to live for;" and Edith, whose love for Julia was as deep as it was discriminating, from that moment determined on getting her charming sister married as soon as possible, mated with one who would take in his charge her soul.

Mr. Sweetapple was not abashed by Julia's rebuke. He made answer, "I have so often heard you spoken of as Miss Julia, that it is difficult to attune my mind and tongue to a changed order of things. The world is much ruled by custom, which is responsible for many of its evils. Do you not think so?"

"I think there are many evil customs, and some of the worst are those which can hardly be called customs, they have been in existence such a short time."

"Such as?"

"Such as every one of position in this town of Masston living outside of it, avoiding its walls, except at certain hours, as if they were plague-stricken—and they may be plague-stricken for aught I know."

"What, what, what?" inquired an elderly gentleman with an enormous shirt-frill and a voice like a duck; others had also noticed Julia's words, and the attention of the whole table was turned on Mr. Sweetapple. "Surely," said he accepting the notice of the guests as a tribute to his fame, "Surely there are reasons! The spread of commerce brings with it various unavoidable changes—the distribution of wealth is one, and that alone leads to changes beyond the power of man to calculate or control. Mr. Warner can tell you how paramount are the claims of commerce."

"Then," answered Julia, with an enchanting air of decision, "let us have no more commerce."

On which there rose the first laugh of the dinner, in which all joined, and by which the separate guests, till then like separated links, became one chain running round the table.

Mr. Sweetapple—stabbing the breast of a chicken—his face covered with one of those comprehensive smiles which can commit a theft like any pickpocket, resumed the talk by addressing himself to all, in a melodious voice, and saying, "There are, no doubt, many customs springing up around us daily which are, in Hamlet's words, 'more honoured in the breach than in the observance.' "

It was part of Mr. Sweetapple's composition to have a pretty taste in literature.

One of the commercial celebrities present, catching these last words, here struck in with much encouragement, "Have you seen the great actor? I'm told he's a monstrous clever fellow, and has made I don't know how much money, more than any of us ever made in double the time in Masston."

"I have heard of him, Mr. Bruton," replied Julia, "and am dying to see him." Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed as she spoke.

"It is not to be supposed," said Mr. Gadso in mellow tones, "that a great actor's life is one of idleness. Forgive me, Bruton, if I misapprehend you, but that would seem to be the scope of your remark. I myself am aware, from my labours in the pulpit, how much exertion is involved in the mere continuous strain of the voice. It is true that the actor's words are written for him, while we, my dear breth—my dear Bruton—are dependent on our own mental powers, or, I should rather say, on the suggestion—really one might almost say the inspiration, vouchsafed to us. Still the actor's is not an idle profession."

Mrs. Gadso's forehead appeared to be sinking in when she heard these words: many more were aghast at this comparison between the pulpit, which they all held in reverence, and the stage, which was widely regarded as a part

of the black art. Had such sentiments been uttered by any one but Mr. Gadso—had any one but Mr. Gadso spoken of the theatre in such terms, there would have been a general and a bitter outcry. As it was, there was a general and silent astonishment.

Mr. Sweetapple, on whom Julia's remark to Mr. Bruton had not been lost, with that half-confident, half-timid air which became him, said, "Then you think, Mr. Gadso, that there is no harm in theatrical representations?"

"It has been well said, 'that everybody has his own theatre, in which he is manager, actor, prompter, playwright, scene-shifter, box-keeper, door-keeper all in one, and audience into the bargain.' And surely, Edward," continued Mr. Gadso, who was in the habit of addressing such young soldiers of the Cross as he specially favoured by their Christian names, "there not only need be no harm—there may be positive good. I do not insist on it. If it make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while

the world stands. Still I am reminded that the drama did ever begin by being the servant of the Church, or the direct interpreter of the Church. You will find that in all nations this has been so. What higher aim could any institution have?"

"What, indeed!" arose in a pious chorus, while some exclaimed to each other in hospitable tones, "What a wonderful man! where does he get it all from?" Even Julia was softened. She looked at Edith during the delivery of the passage, "Everybody has his own theatre," and Edith returned the look with an admiring glance mixed with great sweetness, as if shaping her lips to blow her a kiss.

"But," said an inquiring soul, "is there no danger of vaingloriousness, or of becoming habituated to deceit in simulating the images and passions of other men?"

"If it were a sin to simulate the images of others, the painters of those noble faces which

are now looking down upon us from these walls"—and all eyes for the first time saw the Ascham family of the past looking down upon them—"would be in evil case. And I opine that to imitate the passions, the good as an ensample to be copied, the evil to be shunned, may have a salutary effect." [It is almost a pity that Mr. Gadso had no opportunity of becoming acquainted with the personal experience of 'Lizzebeth Tappit.] "Some of you," continued the elated man, "may remember the impression made by a picture which I drew a month or so ago, of an impenitent sinner's deathbed. I must confess, and some of you will call to mind, that something of that impression was due to a gift, a histrionic gift, with which I have been endowed, and which I am accustomed to cultivate by reading aloud with proper meaning and inflection the works of our great Shakespeare."

Then turning to Mrs. Warner, he said to her in private, "You have a Shakespeare?"

"Yes."

"Well, we will see if my old power has in anything diminished."

"How I wish Lord Limethorpe had been here," said one; "his views on these things are so positive."

"Yes; and it is such a comfort to be told what to do," said another. "I am sure I shall always look upon the theatre as the greatest evil of our time. Of course Mr. Gadso is an exceptional person. I never follow him except in prayer, and when he is opening up the Scriptures." This was said by a lady in silk attire, whose mind and soul, and all her other thinking apparatus, which was of the meanest order, had as much connection with the brocade she wore as one of the flowers on the table had to do with the mustard pot. Mr. Warner was no doubt surprised, he was opposed for the first time in his life to his clerical guide. But an idea suddenly struck him, and he said to Julia, in a voice which only she and Mr.

Sweetapple caught, "Would you really like to see this great actor?"

And Julia, for the first time in her new relation to him, felt inclined to become his sister. She replied with one word—

"Immensely."

And he, observing her cordiality, and how much he could procure by it, responded with the assurance—

"You shall go to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV.

" The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience."
—*Hamlet*, ii. 2.

When Benjamin Jeavons heard from Dr. Cumberladge that Sarah Armstrong was a friend of his, the sunshine to him became more golden, and the air he breathed more sweet. When this maid—about whom he refused to think lest his only belief in the world should slip from him, the belief that whoever, or whatever, God had once touched should never perish—when Sarah did at last come into his mind as the personal friend of the great doctor, and she whom he had deemed lost was found in safe and holy keeping, the fountains of Benjamin's heart broke up, and the first thing he did after leaving Dr. Cumberladge was to go in search of Paul Blanchard.

Our best sympathies are our good angels, and he is simply a coward who does not obey their guidance.

These two men were well known to each other, but the erratic habits of the designer and man of genius ill suited the sober ways of the would-be provision dealer, and the two friends had not met for some time.

Now that Jeavons had received into his heart the strength which comes from happiness, he went to seek the man whose moral weakness was to him a constant source of pain and vexation. For Jeavons believed that Blanchard's fondness for the tavern sprang from nothing else than utter selfishness and idleness, together with the steadfast refusal to look upon life as anything else but an evil inheritance, or a piece of ill luck.

"O Paul, my good fellow! what are you doing here?"

Benjamin had gone to the old haunt where, more in fear than in anger, he thought to find

his friend, and found him, early in the day as it was, at the Green Dragon, his human clay soaked into very mud, his eyes red as if they had been staring into a burning fiery furnace; and all his external being the picture of abject misery and forsakenness.

"What are you doing here, Master Martin Luther?" inquired Blanchard, in the impudent manner which always beset him when in his cups, and made him much resemble an ape in his antics.

"I came to look for you," replied Benjamin, with a touch of pain in his voice.

"Well, here I am; fire up, Calvin, open the everlasting doors, and roll me into the eternal brimstone prepared for the devil and all his angels."

"Paul, I've got an idea."

"Then throw it away; when any new idea comes to me now, I chuck it into a glass, pour over it some dark brown spirit to stupefy it, then kill it with boiling water, and finally

swallow it. I have been living on whipped ideas, like some who live on whipped eggs, for more than a week."

"I can't throw it away," said Jeavons with great seriousness.

"Well, give it to me," added the wicked Paul, in a tone which clearly said, "Giving it to me will be just the same as throwing it away."

Jeavons, standing in front of the man-monkey, whose grimaces would have convulsed any one else with laughter, now folded his arms across his breast, his head thrown back, and his eyes set in rims of glaring chalcedony, said with great solemnity, but in a rich, mellow voice, "I dare not throw it away."

"Then I'll share it with you."

"Share it?"

The voice and the message it carried were new to him.

"I'm not drunk, Benjamin," the toper said deprecatingly, as if he had been accused; "and,

with your permission, I will have one glass more, then we'll walk to Ashon, have some dinner, and you and I will spend the day together like men."

Blanchard was one of those who can make their bodies drunk while they keep their minds sober. He was not really drunk, as he had said; he was merely uncottered—all the rivets of his joints had fallen out. He had taken sufficient brandy to turn himself to stone—to take a little more would reanimate him; and at a signal from himself all the rivets would fly to their appointed places, the cotters go home, and he once more be made whole. It was a favourite brag of his that what made other men drunk made him sober.

Jeavons, when he left Dr. Cumberladge's house, although greatly happy in finding the jewel he thought to be lost, was yet lacking something which he could not name, but which his going in search of Blanchard may be said to symbolise. He lacked sympathy.

A common enough lack, and that, no doubt, is one main reason why there is so much hard drinking in the world, and why Masston was more noted for its accursed drunkenness than any other town in England, or Scotland either. The Doctor had distinctly thrown cold water on his plans, had placed lions in his path, and altogether sneered at Benjamin's provision shop. "A provision shop!" he said with great contempt. "Everybody opens a shop now. You will never teach the drunken men and women of Masston that their souls are worth a damson tart to them. There's only one prescription for their malady, but there is no one to make it up."

"What is it?" Benjamin had modestly inquired.

"Faith, hope, and charity. I was going to say a fixed income, but that would be to put the cart before the horse."

"Does a man's income depend upon his faith?"

"You know it does better than I can tell you."

And Benjamin smiled sadly, but intelligibly.

It was then that Jeavons went to seek Blanchard, for he had great confidence in his fire and energy; resolved to confide to him his plans, allure him if possible from the arms of the Dalilah whose embrace was death, and, in short, see if *he* for one could not make up the Doctor's prescription.

The two men had their walk, wandering some three miles out of Masston, through the meadows and under great elms, till they reached a house noted for its tap and other creature comforts held in great repute among men who are more men than monkeys. Then it was that Jeavons unfolded to a dreamer his practical scheme for regenerating the world, or rather, just one sinful corner of it, where there lurked much despair, little love, and still less good-nature. Blanchard listened like one who had no speech, or muscle, or even breath.

Jeavons was so struck with Paul's attention that he thought he must have fallen into a trance, having his eyes open, so profound was his mindfulness.

At last the inventor rose from his seat, and without saying a word walked out of the house, down a lane, whose hedges were gardens, into a field at the foot of whose green slope was what appeared to be a motionless river fringed with golden sedge, as the eyes that have known the pain of love are fringed with lashes soft as the shadows within a rose.

Jeavons who knew the bliss of quiet and being alone with his thoughts, remained smoking his pipe, looking at the thoughts he had shared with his friend and watching the new aspect they had taken.

They were both good-looking men, and beauty in men is doubtless nature's own certificate—sometimes, indeed, writ small—for goodness of temper and freedom of heart. Jeavons was imperious with health and up-

right as a tree by the water-side. Blanchard might not inaptly be compared also to a tree —the tree which bends over a stream, drinks, and remains prying into what lies beneath its surface. Swarthy he was, with clean shaven face, and eyes of blue enamel, which, although so keenly polished, suggested great sweetness, even the sweetness of a scent that lives long after the flower which gave it has been thrown into an oven. Benjamin, on the contrary, was fair, with a beard marked off with black and brown,—he was a mixture of iron and gold, like a lighthouse at night.

Suddenly Jeavons, awaking out of his reverie, recollected that Paul had now been absent more than an hour. He arose and went out in search. He could nowhere see a living soul. He ran down the lane, across the field, and on to the river; and as he ran the thoughts which crossed his mind about Paul endeared him to him. He was his only companion— true, he had neglected him, but would do so

no more; the hardness of the times and the universal frivolousness had been too much even for him, but he would attend to the Doctor's prescription. And, ten thousand times swifter than it takes to tell, he connected Paul with the river. Where the thought came from, or the vision, he could never say, but there he saw the David of his soul lying stark dead among the silvery pebbles of the clear brown stream. A horrible blackness fell on Jeavons, who, bewildered and panic-stricken, began snatching rapid-revolving glances at the landscape, as a frightened creature hunted to death stares at the dangers which beset it turn where it will. It was a new experience to Jeavons who had never known his imagination wander before.

It was the birth of friendship.

Turning round he saw Paul close to the river sitting under an oak, which for the divine liquor supplied to it gave it back in return a covering of plumes which gathered heavenly music as it strayed by. Paul was evidently

playing with the reeds; and the moment Benjamin saw him his heart went out to him with a bound of joy and love, and he ran to embrace him. At least if these two had lived in a land where the sun is never soiled with soot, and where the fruits grow round and oval by the Spirit of God which there rules universal nature, he would have run to embrace the friend who thus had been born to him. But being of Masston, whence the Spirit of God had flown, or at least but seldom stayed there over a single night in the long year, Benjamin put his hands into his pockets and made his way to Paul as if nothing had happened.

"It won't do," said Paul quietly, almost unconcernedly, and then turning his eyes from the reed he was torturing to Ben, and seeing his face wrinkled with pain, his hands, indeed his entire person changed by the sadness of his soul, he sprang on to his feet, and in a voice of gladness exclaimed—

"But I have got something that will do."

"What is it?" inquired Benjamin, his face becoming deadly pale, as if the opening of his lips had made a way of escape for his troubled soul.

"A play."

At other times Blanchard would have laughed at his own words, only he caught sight of two upright bars which very suddenly rose and reared themselves up against Benjamin's forehead in a direct line with his straight nose, almost of the same proportion, and looking as if they had been made by a blow from a schoolmaster's cane.

"A play?" he again inquired in an agitated manner.

"Yes, you can't do it in any other way. Look here," continued Paul, pulling up three reeds and placing one on the grass as he spoke. "These poor devils don't care for your good bread, or your pure tea, or saving their money; why should they? But if you can show them that they have got as great a soul

as you have, as great a heart, the same fierce blood for taking vengeance, the same sweet tears to give for pure love and forgiveness, the same divine compassion, and the very same hope of eternal life, then I think they would be glad to deal at your shop—perhaps even wish to live. It's exactly the same with me. I never get any fresh reasons for knowing that I am a man and not a beast, but I want to rush out into the street and tell them to the first man I meet, which, however, generally happens to be a woman in want of food and clothing."

Jeavons heaved a sigh, and though disappointed, he saw in his friend an earnestness which made him proud of the emotion he had felt for him ten minutes before.

"This is folly," he said at last; "what good can a play do anybody?"

"You have never been to the play?" inquired Blanchard dubiously.

"Never!"

"My God!" ejaculated the other, not without reverence. "Do you know anything of the man who wrote—

> "Come, let's away to prison;
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask my blessing I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live
> And pray and sing and tell old tales and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news: and we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
> And take upon's the mystery of things,
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out
> In a wall'd prison, parts and sects of great ones,
> That ebb and flow by the moon"?

"I know Shakspeare wrote that," said Benjamin modestly.

"Well, but do you know," rapidly replied the other, "that those words were written for a play, and if there had been no play-house and no play-actors, and no fire and glory of the stage, they never would have been written at all, and you may read and read yourself blind with them, but until you see a great actor, all endowed with voice and shape and mind to

give them the form that Shakspeare gave them, you will never know what they mean."

"Stuff!"

"Oh," continued Blanchard, in a little mockery, but retaining the earnestness which had charmed Jeavons into love. "Oh, I do not by 'you' mean you, Benjamin Jeavons, late artist in steel, now a purveyor of cheese made from milk instead of chalk, and of tea innocent of adultery. I mean rather the unthinking world, for whom the play was written, and by the 'unthinking' I do not mean those incapable of thought, but rather those weaklings whose attention is never gained except by spectacle and show."

Jeavons made a gesture of impatience.

"Let me go on. I don't often preach, but when the fit is strong it is difficult for me to shake it off. Now, I have heard you, Benjamin, rave about Jesus Christ until I have been ashamed of you. By raving I mean saying things of Him which you consider to be pro-

fane when applied to any one else. Pray tell me this—Are there any words in the New Testament which you are quite sure would not possess another meaning if you heard them spoken by Christ himself?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"No evasion, Mr. Jeavons. Do me the favour to let me hear you repeat these words—

> 'And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies.'"

Jeavons repeated the lines as if they were a portion of the Psalms.

"Exactly," said Paul, "you speak like a Methodist parson, which, with all respect for an estimable person, I may say is not, as a rule, a man of eloquence and taste, and who knows as much about representing the human passion of grief in madness, as a pewter pot knows about the porter which it contains."

"Now let me make a proposal to you," he continued. "If you will come with me to-morrow night and see Macready act King Lear, I

will promise not to touch another spot of liquor for—well, how long shall we say?" inquired Paul, with a piteous look of inquiry on his face.

Benjamin, who knew the preciousness of this opportunity, hesitated, as if to weigh several eventualities, and at last proposed "A week."

"It is worth more," said the poor fellow, who began to feel a biting contempt for this sort of compounding. "I'll make it a month."

"Then I will go."

And both men were happy. One that his friend was going to the theatre, the other that his friend would not be drunk again for a month. Both became happy in supposititious consequences.

They went to see King Lear. The mighty actor, then in the very noon of his glory, himself elated and borne along of the applause which to him, more than wine, brought power, was never so much himself as when playing to

poor people, and such as were not ashamed of laughing and crying in public.

Jeavons was utterly overcome, a new world opened to him. And strangest of all consequences, one which certainly Jeavons would have spurned away had it presented itself to him a few days before, was this—

"Paul," he said, after they came out of the hot pit, "did we say liquor or brandy?"

"We said liquor," replied Paul, his mouth beginning to water, "but I really think we meant to specify brandy."

"I am sure of it," said the other. "Now let's go and have some oysters, brown bread and butter, and a pot of cooling stout. This comes of going to the play. But, Paul, 'the play's the thing.' You are quite right. That I should have lived all these years and never seen a play!"

It was a wonderful conversion. "Where have I been," he would say, imitating the actor's wonderful notes at the end of the fourth act.

"Where have I been?—Where am I?—Fair daylight?—I know not what to say.—I will not swear these are my hands: let's see; I feel this pin prick.—Would I were assured of my condition!"

The two men whom we saw enter the Pudding Bag on the Sunday evening when 'Lizzebeth Tappit had just finished her excited criticism on the same King Lear were these two. Their mission had been better accomplished than it could have been had both of them together undertaken it.

Alas! there was not ready money enough in the entire Pudding Bag to pay for one poor seat in pit or gallery.

"The money I will find on one condition," said Jeavons.

But he met with no response. They were not only past hope—they dare not indulge in it.

"As many as will promise to pay me back if they are pleased,—mark you, I say if they are

pleased, if anybody says afterwards he was not pleased, I'll not ask him for the money—I'll find the money for them, and then I'll show them how to pay it back. And if that great white jug which I see yonder is empty, I shall be very happy to pay for its being filled with the best Sunday ale that can be bought!"

"Here's a go!" remarked one of the Pudding Bag.

And a mighty go it was.

CHAPTER XV.

"A sullen light of hope."—*The Opium Eater.*

"Where is every feeling more roused in favour of virtue than at a good play? Where is goodness so feelingly, so enthusiastically learnt? What so solemn as to see the excellent passions of the human heart called forth by a great actor, animated by a great poet? To hear Siddons repeat what Shakespeare wrote? To behold the child and his mother, the noble and the artizan, the monarch and his subjects, all ages and all ranks, convulsed with the common passion, wrung with one common anguish, and with loud sobs and cries doing involuntary homage to the God that made their hearts?"

—*Sydney Smith on Hannah More.*

EARLY the next morning, 'Lizzebeth Tappit might have been seen by the lamp-posts of Masston, running for two miles or more, through streets and over bridges, which crossed a ditch called the canal, where the entire dust of the town had passed the night, and woke up as she ran over them on her way to the house of Jane and Mrs. Ruckles. Both ladies were still in bed. 'Lizzebeth, with the

precipitousness of enthusiastic youth, gave a loud knock at the door, which was answered by Mrs. Ruckles, who, opening the casement of her bedroom window, put out her face, which was enclosed in a very large cap with very large snowy frills running all round it.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Every blessed soul in the Puddin' Bag is goin' to the play to-night," answered 'Lizzebeth throwing back her neck, opening wide her arms, and staring with eyes equally wide up at the cap and frills.

Mrs. Ruckles received that statement in silence, but she reached forth both her hands into the air, raised one, which, with great emphasis, she brought down on the other, as if she had been an auctioneer knocking down a bargain, and then disappeared, leaving the window open.

Jane meanwhile had run down to let 'Lizzebeth in.

"Mother says you must stay and get break-

fast; was they very cross wi' you for stayin' out?"

"No—not when I said I had bin wi' you, and then I up and told them all about the king and the lady. I say, Jinnie, do you think the king know'd as how she did not hang herself?"

"Why, o' course he know'd, because he killed the slave as was a hanging of her—them's 'is own words."

"Well, it were a treat, and your mother is a angel and have made a angel of me. Now I'm off."

"Why, what did ye come for, if you're goin' away a thissen?"

"I just thought," answered the other quietly, "as I'd run down here to the brook and get some water-cresses for their brekfusses; and I looked in to tell you that they were all goin' to the play to-night, with one of the swell coves as is at the Oxford Works, and a friend of hissn. I thought you'd like to know. Now I'm off."

"You'd better stay and see mother—she won't be a minnit."

"No; I'm off."

And off this time she was—with a lie in her throat, and a sorrow at her heart. She had come for no earthly reason than to make glad the hearts of the Ruckleses by the news she carried, as her own heart had been made glad. She was sure they would be ready to jump out of their skin for joy; and here was Jane Ruckles asking her in the coldest way what she had come for. "Why, what could I ha' come for?" Then followed the ready lie—the stung pride, the hurt sympathy and bitter rage, for having run all that way "for nuthin', an' worse, nor nuthin'." "Yes—I am a angel, no doubt," the wretched girl said bitterly, being painfully reminded of her besetting sin, the sin of quick and easy lying. So quick did these lies come to her, whenever she wanted one, that it was a cause of humorous wonder to her now and then, "wherever they could come from."

"'Lizzebeth!"

When 'Lizzebeth heard her own name shrieked as if from the sky, she turned round and there was Mrs. Ruckles running after her. That worthy woman came up with much happiness on her face, and a request that 'Lizzebeth would tell her "all 'ticklars about the people of the Puddin' Bag agoin' to the play."

"Why, it's like a migral. Dear heart! how a little run do make one blow," she said as she stood panting with the effects of her race after 'Lizzebeth. "Well, only to think," she continued after hearing the girl's account, "I could almost cry. Come thee ways back and have some breakfast."

"No, I told feyther as how I was never goin' to be a naughty gal agin, and I mun go an' look after their brekfusses."

"Well, well, go thee ways, p'raps Jane an' I will look in at the Puddin' Bag after work tonight."

"Dew!"

And the two parted, and 'Lizzebeth once more believed in the goodness of the world—and that she "might yet become a angel." She forgave herself the lie about the water-cresses—nor did she go to gather any, but ran back as fast as she came to look after their brekfusses.

Mrs. Ruckles was employed at the Oxford Works, as was also a youthful scapegrace, a son of hers, who was a great trouble to his mother. Jane now and then helped her mother when work was brisk, as happened to be the case now, and on those occasions Mrs. Ruckles always gave Jane a treat. Bob Ruckles did not live with his mother for reasons of his own. He, too, was employed at the great works. Mere lad as he was he had already acquired all the matured vices of evil men.

When Mrs. Ruckles and her daughter made their appearance at the works about ten o'clock, a great crowd of workpeople, in their shirt-sleeves and paper caps, were hanging

about the gateway waiting for the bell to ring that summoned them to labour.

And to the honour of Edith Warner be it said, that it was owing to her suggestion and her influence that no woman at the Oxford Works began the labour of the day before ten o'clock, or laboured more than three hours at a time, or for longer than six hours altogether out of the twenty-four.

The groups in shirt-sleeves and paper caps were discussing the play. Some had followed the example of the Ruckleses and had seen King Lear. At this moment Paul Blanchard came up and said, addressing half-a-dozen workmen—

"Well, lads, if any of you would like to go to the play to-night, there is a banker who will pay for you on the sole condition that you pay him back in his own way—which way is that you condescend to buy your bread and butter and such things at his shop. The difficulty in the matter is, that you will suspect

some trap is being laid for you, and the difficulty is increased by this bread, butter, tea, coffee, and the rest being the very best in the world, and are to be sold to you at the same price as the imitation stuff you have hitherto been getting."

"Who is the banker, Mr. Blanchard?" inquired some of the more intelligent.

"Well, he is an old friend of mine who thinks he can do some good by helping poor devils to save their money; and he's got a notion that if the very poor were better fed or could only get the worth of their money in what they buy for food, it would be all the better for them."

"So it would," they said.

"Why, in course it would," said Mrs. Ruckles, who had joined the group. "My poor Jim never struck me but once in his life, and that was when we were all starving; a better husband nor a better father never lived when he had his meals reg'lar, and they was warm.

Are the women to be allowed to go to the play?" Mrs. Ruckles inquired.

She was well known among the workmen at the Oxford Works, was one of its oldest hands, and thoroughly respected.

"My dear Mrs. Battle," said Paul, whose generosity in giving away names was as great as in giving away spirituous drink, "a theatre without ladies would be as bad as a rose-tree without roses—nothing but green leaves and thorns—that is, cold-hearted men and critics; of course the women will go. Actors are as fond of tears as they are of hurrahs, and I hate to see men cry."

"Then put my name down," said Mrs. Ruckles. "And mine," said several others.

Blanchard, who disliked the carrying out of details, now wished that Jeavons were here to strike this iron while it was hot, and, after promising to be back in a short while, turned to go in the direction of Summer Lane, where his friend Benjamin lived. He had never

thoroughly believed in the plan till now, and now it had taken possession of him.

Turning the corner of the Oxford Works, he met its great proprietor and his beautiful wife. It was Edith's first visit since their marriage. Paul took off his hat and was walking past uncovered.

"Where are you going, Mr. Blanchard?" inquired Warner somewhat imperatively—but the tone was friendly.

"We are organising a little plan," said Paul with a slight flush; for it is certain that if that beautiful woman had not been hanging on Warner's arm, the answer would have connected the interrogator with a place whose name was well enough known in Masston, but about whose geographical position almost all were as ignorant as if it had been an African lake.

"I do not allow any organisation of any kind in the Oxford Works which has not received my sanction."

"This is not in the Oxford Works,"

answered Paul with a menace in his voice, but for the sake of his friend, and for the sake of the plan which had already cost him much, he restrained himself, probably for the first time in his life.

"But it is with the men of the Oxford Works," returned Warner quite smoothly, and to the perfect satisfaction of Edith, "and you know that I do not approve of organisations among my people into which I have not examined."

"Quite right," said Edith very sweetly. "Do you not perceive that?" This was addressed with such a bewitching smile to Paul, that, to use his own expression, "knocked him into a cocked hat."

"Come," said Warner, "you know I am always ready to assist in any plan that is for the good of the men."

"But you will consider this to be for the evil of the men," said Paul, who never flinched from stating his own case with clearness, and

always demanded the most perfect clearness in others who had any dealings with him—a quality as rare as gold, which exists everywhere but only found by a few.

"Is it not for that very reason that Mr. Warner should know it?" remarked Edith with quiet dignity, but still regarding Paul with generous interest.

"You are so very religious up there," said Paul, turning his face towards Elbston, "that you will throw cold water on this plan at once. And"—he paused, and then with great deliberation added—"*I* will not have cold water thrown upon it."

Warner, who knew his man, behaved with great tact. "Come," he said, "let us go inside," taking Paul by the arm as if he had been a clergyman; "let us hear all about this."

Paul being linked thus with the beautiful woman by her husband, felt a wonderfully sweet constraint put upon him, and the three walked arm-in-arm together through the gates,

and into Warner's room, to the astonishment of many, the envy of a few, and the excited jealousy of one.

"May I go in to hear this?" inquired Edith with some doubt.

"Surely," said Warner.

And Paul added with a confidential smile, "I am sure you won't like it."

Warner was in capital spirits. He had with some difficulty brought himself to consent to Edith's visit to the works with the object of becoming personally acquainted with some of the work-people. There were reasons why she should not acquire the habit of going there at any time. But such was her bearing with Blanchard, so practical, and yet so gracious, that he began to hope that, perhaps after all, she might find some real pastime in the pursuit of schemes, some of which she had mentioned to him, and to which Warner had given his consent under the belief that they could never be achieved.

They entered the splendid private room of the great man. The blind outside the miraculous door once again did mysterious duty, and it was Warner's will that the three should be uninterrupted as long as he found any interest in the interview. At a touch from him the blind would rise, and a message would be brought to Warner that would enable him to dispose of everything and everybody, including himself, in three seconds of time.

But the blind remained down. Warner was thoroughly charmed with Paul, whose speech was not only good, but every three words he uttered contained an idea. As for Edith she was dumb. She had not the least idea that a workman, as she held Paul to be, could talk in that way. As for her plans they met with the fate of the magician's serpents, which were swallowed up by the serpent of Aaron.

At length Warner said, "This is excellent; it is really very good. I am surprised and I am pleased. I will help this good man with

his provision shop, and that will do away with the necessity of going to the theatre."

"And I say it will not," returned Paul, with much energy. "The people whom my friend is going to save are already lost. If men ever were lost, they are these. You don't have to wait to go to hell to be lost. As far as I understand anything about it, people are sent there to be punished."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Edith, "how like Mr. Gadso. Do you go to hear Mr. Gadso?"

"I never heard of him," and Paul continued —"As for being lost, these wretched men and women have lost not only their all, but themselves as well. Why they live is my only wonder. But if they once see and hear this man act they will want to live, at least some of them will, and hope among them is as catching as measles."

"I feel quite sure if they could hear my friend Mr. Gadso,—and you might easily persuade them to go some Sunday evening," said Edith

with very great sweetness of voice and manner,—"it would be better than their going to see this actor that you speak of so highly."

Blanchard laughed, and his laugh, musical as it was, startled Edith. Beneath its music her fine ear detected tones of rebuke, of contempt, and defiance, but looking close into Paul's face as he said—"Now, if you were dying of hunger, would you like to be taken merely to look at some swine feeding?" and seeing it marked with great earnestness, she said, turning to her husband—

"Robert, we must let Mr. Blanchard have his way, I feel it." Then turning to Paul she said with singular clearness, "With my husband's consent I will lend this man a hundred pounds; he will want money to make a good start. I shall be most interested in his work, and trust to be kept well informed of its progress."

"He will accept help from no one, and most certainly not from you, or any who live in Elbston."

"Indeed! may I inquire why?" replied Mrs. Warner, discovering at the same time no small amount of irritation rising within her, which she suppressed with difficulty.

"He says, with much bitterness, that the rich have robbed the poor of their pleasure in life; that they have no pleasures themselves, and, therefore, have none to give away. If he be asked how the rich have robbed the poor, he has a thousand different replies to make, which however mean the same thing, namely, that working people have been turned into machines."

"Do I know this man?" inquired Warner.

"No," said Paul quite innocently.

"I should like to know him of all things. Is he young or old?" asked Edith.

"I should think about the age of Mr. Warner," said Paul with indifference.

"And quite a working man?"

"Oh yes, but he has always been his own master."

"And his name?"

"Is Benjamin Jeavons—he lives in Summer Lane."

There was no apparent recognition of the name by Warner, and it is likely that he had quite forgotten all about the youth who, many years ago, gave him a bloody nose and a black eye.

"Well, Mr. Blanchard," observed Warner with promptness, "I will help you, as I said before—only don't go to the theatre. I request it as a personal favour."

Here the blind outside the door, unseen by any from within, was raised, and a clerk entered with a note on pressing business. The interview was over, and Edith remained alone with her husband. Paul bowed to her and went for a short while into the designing-room, and then proceeded to find Benjamin Jeavons. He was, however, detained a moment by James Reklaw, who met him at the door, shrivelled up with jealousy at the length of the interview in the master's room.

"Do you go to the theatre to-night, Mr. Blanchard?" he inquired.

"I do."

"You are going to take some of the men, I hear."

"It is, I think, quite as likely that I shall do so as that you to-night will sleep with your mouth open and your nose shut, to the great discomfort of Mrs. Reklaw."

"If it is only as likely as that, then you won't go, for I don't snore, and Mrs. Reklaw does."

"The man who can so easily discover to another such secrets is a beast, beneath all human consideration!" exclaimed Paul in his mock-grandiose manner, and stalked away, leaving Mr. Reklaw fixed to the ground, and for a while speechless. At last he muttered—

"Oh, is that it; perhaps you will one of these days want a little consideration yourself," not knowing what he said. He then proceeded to

ferret out from among the hands what had been determined upon with regard to the theatre, together with the names of those who had promised to go. He knew that this would be expected of him by Mr. Warner.

There are men in the world who can, at a moment's notice, assume the nature of the lowest animals by a mere act of will. Mr. Reklaw had the greatest pleasure in turning himself into a ferret. Warner knew this, and the utmost confidence existed between both.

Now, when a man condescends to become one of the inferior animals, the consequences of such incarnation are not easy to determine—for those consequences may affect not himself only, but others likewise.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I know that *Deformed;* a' has been a vile thief this seven year; a' goes up and down like a gentleman."

—*Much Ado about Nothing*, iii. 3.

When Warner assured Julia Ascham that she should go to the play, it passed through his mind in the course of dinner that if that active young lady chose of her own will to go, go she would in spite of him, while if he made it appear to her that she went because he wished it, he might raise himself in her estimation. While Warner was superior to all human sympathy, he was far from being indifferent to social influence: he cared much more for what the sparkling Julia might say in his favour, than for any pleasure he could procure for her—indeed of that he thought nothing. At the same time Mr. Warner was a man to

whom any form, shape, or fashion of inconsistency was a great horror. "Let us, above all things, be consistent," he would say, and no one could be more consistent than he. He determined, therefore, that Edith should procure Julia's going to hear and see the great actor, with whose praises Masston was then ringing.

It so happened that Edith was thinking of this very thing. Mr. Gadso had spoken encouragingly of the drama. Mr. Sweetapple was evidently not disinclined to it, and as she was meditating Julia's happiness by connecting her with a clergyman, and if possible with Mr. Sweetapple, she snatched at the opportunity of bringing the two together under circumstances which could not fail to be agreeable to both.

There are two things in this world as firm in their foundations as the bed of the sea, and which no amount of piety or other influence equally solemn has proved strong enough to destroy. One is the love of a priest for his

dinner, and the other the passion of a woman for making a match; but then women have been less selfish than men.

Edith was unquestionably a little anxious, but she could trust Mr. Sweetapple implicitly.

Moreover, after the interview with Paul Blanchard, in which she learned the use that was to be made of the great actor's powers, by which men and women, hitherto indifferent to life, should become convulsed with a common passion, and be roused to some human enthusiasm by being wrung with one common anguish, she became possessed of the desire to see the result that would follow. Blanchard had much impressed her with the excellence of his manner, and the earnestness of his speech. She had felt some irritation at first on finding her convictions and plans so ruthlessly cast aside by one whom she esteemed as a mere workman, but a little reflection made her see that she had much to learn in the matter of helping the poor. The more she thought of it

the more she was convinced that she ought to see for herself the good or ill success of that part of the plan, proposed by these two working-men, which was designed to bring those who were lost back again into the possession of themselves.

So she said, "Robert, dear, if Julia is to go to the play I ought to take her. Mr. Sweetapple can still go with us, and he can bring his mother, who, I am told, speaks quite openly in approval of the play. Will you not come with us?"

"How can I?" he answered, and his white necktie seemed to grow whiter as he spoke. But he added, "I think you might go. Mr. Sweetapple is a very superior man."

"I quite think so," replied Edith, referring to the Apple.

"You have known him longer and more intimately than I. Would you wish him to marry Julia?"

"I am praying for it."

"Then," remarked Warner with emphasis, "it will come to pass."

So Edith and Julia, Mr. Sweetapple and his mother, went to the play. Mrs. Sweetapple was a charming little round lady, fond of firing off jokes in the French language, dear to her from her girlish days at a French Convent school, at which jokes few laughed, herself probably being the only person who understood them.

They took their books, but the books might as well have been burnt for the use that was made of them. They could not keep their eyes off the man from the moment he exclaimed, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," and all through the five acts of Macbeth, did these four sit spell-bound. When all was over, and Julia, in a low sweet voice trembling with anguish, said, throwing herself back in her seat, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen," she proved how deeply had been impressed upon her the awful sermon

which the poet had preached, and the poet's actor had expounded.

"Let us go," said Edith awe-stricken.

"Mon Dieu!" said the Sweetapple, but this time she did not laugh. "Maintenant nous connaissons l'enfer."

Sweetapple himself was moved, but had sufficient mastery over himself to be aware that if he pressed the hand of Julia, a responsive pressure would be returned to him.

They drove back to the Hall to supper, and the whole four gave Mr. Warner an account of the tragedy, Julia repeating whole passages from memory and, at the same time displaying no small ability in the matter of dramatic criticism.

"I think," she said, with that impetuosity which belongs to irrepressible youth, "I think it quite impossible and unnatural that a man who could talk so well as Macbeth could be such a villain—

"'Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires.'

"Again," she continued, "this is not the language of an assassin—

> "'Pity, like a naked new-born babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
> That tears shall drown the wind.'

"A man," she went on, with a thoughtfulness quite new in her, "with such an imagination ought not to have been a murderer,—

> "'False face must hide what the false heart doth show.'"

"Well, but you see he had been met by the weird sisters, who told him he should be king," pleaded Mr. Sweetapple.

"But," she retorted, "they did not tell Macbeth to kill Duncan."

"True," said the clergyman, "Satan has only to put a crown in reach of a traitor's hand; he need not tell him to steal it, or murder its rightful owner. Bad men always carry out the devil's suggestions."

"Had it not been for his wife, Macbeth

could not have been a murderer. I am sure of it," said Julia with tears in her eyes.

Warner laughed a good deal—at least what was a good deal for him—while Mrs. Sweetapple, disconcerted by Warner's evident misconception of the play and the player, said in French, " Had you been there you would have found it as easy to laugh as to steal my purse."

"But you all forget," said Warner with amused animation, " that this is nothing but a play. I laugh at your being so much imposed upon. You are, in fact, in the condition of those who have received a strong delusion to believe a lie—and as your visit to the theatre has helped you to understand a mysterious passage of Scripture, I no longer regret your having gone."

Warner's explanation of his laughter was not altogether true. The passages quoted by Julia had made a strong impression on him. Had there not been in his day much foulness, and was there not in it much fairness? Was not

his, also, that strength of purpose which raised Macbeth to a throne? No doubt, he answered to himself, it was; but in his composition there was none of the weakness that damned Macbeth. And this laughter was partly roused by self-gratulation upon this fact, and sprung partly from an irresistible desire to illustrate practically the lines—"False face must hide what the false heart doth show."

They parted for the night. Never once had the motive which carried Edith to the play occurred to her. She had forgotten all about the working people of Masston—the plans of Blanchard and Jeavons, and her own plans—so captive had she been taken by the magic poetry and the tragic events which had been enacted before her.

Warner had now for some time enjoyed the cultivated serenity of a life to which he was not indeed born, but which he had been able to secure by his own devices. He was consoled by the influences of religion; he was

flattered by those who were among the most eminent of its professors. The new day brought for him its delightful and refined ease. Its elevated occupations no longer brought with them surprise, nor did the closing in of night bring a single fear. He was soothed into a forgetfulness of the past, by the charms of the engaging present, and for him the future was not charged with a single care. He was a great man, at least he was the greatest man in Masston.

To all such men there comes a day in his life—one single day—when a man enjoys a perfect consciousness of an absolute possession of all that he has desired, and the goods laid up in store. This was Warner's state on the morning after the play. He had risen early as usual. The fields, with their centuries of garnered beauty, which sloped from his feet were his ; so were the tall trees that stood in the emerald windings, and which, like old retainers, bowed to him as he stood like one receiving worship. He recognised the mellow

and perfumed air of the gardens, as if it had been a servant serving him, and looked upon the myriads of roses that decked the place with blooming sweetness as so many witnesses to heaven, that the talents it had bestowed had not been wrapped in a napkin.

He was presently joined by Edith, who found sweet relief from the oppression of the tragic turmoil of the night before in looking at the simple forms of life which lay around her. She had been greatly wrought upon, but was by this time fairly disenchanted. The theatre, her husband had well said, was an unsanctified place, and where God was not no Christian should be found.

Alas! Edith Warner, good as she was, must be made to spread the contagion of that wrong which reduces the Supreme to a being that can be caught like a mouse. Let the trap be big enough, of the approved shape, and baited in the prescribed fashion, you shall, according to her teachers, not only be able to

catch your god, but keep him, and train him to do your will.

Julia came next into the garden, reading and looking as if the watches of the night had been spent on battle-fields, rather than within the peaceful walls of Baston Hall. She came up to Edith and Warner as they were walking on the soft lawn, enjoying the pure day.

"'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.'

"Is not that beautiful?" inquired Julia, as she gave them "Good morning" and each a kiss, the first, and as it happened, the last she ever gave to one of them.

"I wish we had not gone there last night," said Edith, taking Julia's arm; "I regret it very much."

"I would not have missed it for the world," replied her sister still reading:—

"'I remember now,
I am in this earthly world, where to do harm
Is often laudable; to do good sometimes
Accounted dangerous folly.'

"Those lines will suit us both, I think,—to

you belongs the 'dangerous folly,' let me have the laudable 'harm.'" She said this with a smile that deprecated criticism, and continued, "I wonder if all the poor people who were there last night—and how full the place was! —are thinking as much about the play as we are?"

This recalled to Edith's memory Blanchard's words regarding the famous actor. But she was unwilling to believe that the common people, who occupied the pit or gallery, could have received anything but harm from the performance.

Here the breakfast gong sounded. In those days the early morning newspaper had not found its way to Masston, and men had time to meet and talk with each other, nor did the day rush in upon a man like a young bull mistaking the door.

Warner strolled away to his works where work was almost always found, although other works were slack; and in general, work was

then a little slack in the town. Men said there had been too much "over-production." And certainly if men occupy their time in producing that which is not wanted, it is likely enough that they will one day find out to their cost that the work left undone by doing that which was not needed, becomes the very work most needed just when the doing of it is impossible.

"Morning, sir," said a man, whose shape and figure appeared to have been suddenly altered, addressing Warner, as he drew near to the steps on which the altered one had taken his stand.

We have seen this man before. But he is not so jolly as he was when we last saw him. The colour has forsaken his cheek. His once ringing voice is hoarse with misery and vexation.

"Good morning," returned Warner with cold but ample courtesy.

"You don't remember me, Mr. Warner?"

"Is it possible that I am speaking to Mr. Birtles?"

"The very same; the same at least, sir, in name.

"How are things with you, sir? Flourishing, I have no doubt. Are you still sending to the Australias?"

Birtles, who stood with his hands in his pockets, observing Warner about to make some affable rejoinder, made a low bow, and, in his sudden fashion, turned away and walked down the street, leaving the great master of the Oxford Works alone, and for the moment irresolute. The position was one of which he had never dreamt, and for which he had made no provision. Had Birtles remained, no irresolution could have seized on that ever-prepared mind. Had Birtles kept his ground, Birtles might have found himself, as if by a stroke of the enchanter's wand, restored to self-confidence and even success. He would most certainly have increased his knowledge, for Birtles did not suspect, nor had he ever suspected, any foul play on the part of

Warner. But the vice of suddenness had beset Birtles all his life through, and this last exhibition of it must convince us of the truth which his wife was always dinning into his ears, that it was as bad as murder for him, a married man, to go treating some people as he did.

Warner, in an unconcerned manner, walked into his room, took from his safe a little book, pondered over it, and sat pondering till he fell asleep. He had of late much increased in fatness.

He rose from his nap, and, as he often did, sauntered into the workshops. Everything was in its place, everybody saluted him with respect, sometimes with reverence and awe. The great wheels and flying bands seemed to fly faster—men's elbows to move quicker—at his approach. Submission met him at every turn, and he himself was again master of himself.

It had grown into the afternoon; and a little

while before the usual hour for Warner to take his leave for the day, Edith drove down to carry him home.

"Robert, dear, come and agree with me," she said, "in this one plan."

He was quite ready to go, and in a listening attitude allowed himself to be led to the carriage, where his wife expounded a method for bringing about a matter of grave import to the people of Masston, which shall be duly explained in the right place.

As the carriage rolled up the wide street which leads into the Elbston Road, it passed a seedy-looking man, who raised his hat and bowed to the Warners. Edith, who was engaged in telling her husband of her schemes, noticed him bow stiffly and with an offended expression on his face.

"Do I know the gentleman?" inquired Edith.

"Oh, dear no," answered Warner, and be-

came so absorbed in thought that he did not hear the rest of his wife's discourse.

The seedy-looking person was Mr. Birtles. Warner remained in this profound study during the rest of the drive, and on arriving at the Hall, after helping his wife to alight, said in a strained voice—

"I must return to the works," and the coachman, with rebellion in his looks, and still more in his heart, drove back as he was bid.

Here was Warner's first opportunity of following Macbeth's advice to himself, thrown away. He was the first to notice it himself—but, lucky fellow as he was, another opportunity followed close on the heels of the one that had been neglected. On his way down to the works he saw Mr. Gadso on foot coming from Masston. He stopped the carriage and said in a cheerful voice—

"Let me take you up. I shall not be a minute in the works where I am going, and

allow me the pleasure of driving you home. Or will you not come and dine with us? Edith will be most happy, and so shall I."

Mr. Gadso, with unusual animation, gladly accepted both invitations.

"I am profoundly thankful to have met you, I need your sympathy, and that of all good men."

It is a pity that our art is not equal to representing the heavenly smiles which broke out on the face of each of these gentles. They shook hands, the one descending from the carriage, the other entering it with a low and reverend stoop.

Warner proceeded to his room.

"Has any one made inquiries for me?"

"No, sir."

"Are you quite sure, has the room been well attended?"

"We are quite sure, sir."

And quite sure Warner could be. Birtles

had not returned, had, in fact, not thought of returning, and Mr. Warner rejoined Mr. Gadso, released from the fangs of a biting terror.

Edith was delighted to see them, and they conversed together all through the evening with much voluble good-nature, will anticipating will, in boundless confidence, as only people who are in Paradise can.

END OF VOL. I.

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